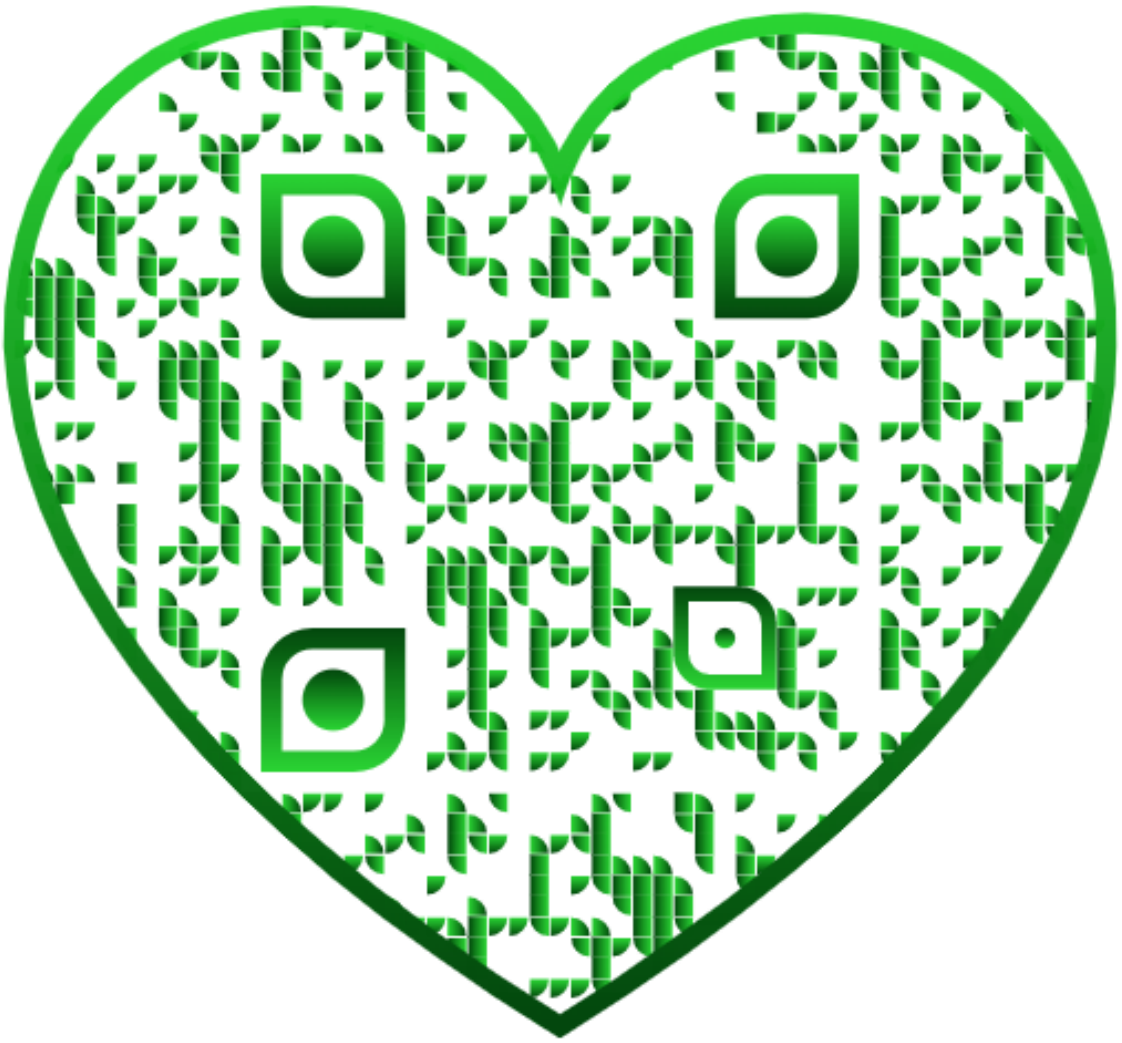
Shar Khentrul Jamphel Lodrö

The REALM *of* SHAMBHALA

A COMPLETE VISION FOR HUMANITY'S PERFECTION

Based on the Kalachakra tradition of Tibetan Buddhism



The Realm of Shambhala

A Complete Vision for Humanity's Perfection

Shar Khentrul Jamphel Lodrö

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Ven. Tenpa'i Gyaltsen

SHAMBHALA

Contents

Preface

Introduction

1. Myths of Shambhala

2. The Four Reliances

3. Realms of Opportunity

4. Manifestations of Shambhala

5. Patterns of Transformation

6. Discovering the Dharma of Definitive Meaning

7. Experiencing Shambhala in Your Life

8. Toward a Golden Age

Appendix 1: The Sutric Lineage of the Great Middle Way

Appendix 2: The Tantric Lineage of the Six Vajra Yogas

Appendix 3: The Golden Age Tradition of the Jonang

Appendix 4: The Eastern Tradition of Dzamthang

About the Author

Preface

In late 2015, Khentrul Rinpoche was in the final leg of a six-month tour that had taken him around the world. During that time, he gave a number of talks introducing people to the idea of Kalachakra and its connection to the realm of Shambhala. It was from his discussions with people attending those teachings that Rinpoche realized how little people understood about Shambhala and what it actually was. While it seemed that everyone had heard of Shambhala, no one appeared to have any clarity on how it was relevant to their lives. By the time he returned home to Australia, Rinpoche had generated a new aspiration. He wanted to write a short and accessible book to clarify the confusion surrounding Shambhala and to provide the basis for connecting with its deeply profound nature. As we sat down to brainstorm ideas for the book's structure, it quickly became apparent to me that the scope of his vision went far beyond anything I had heard before. Within this one subject, he was embedding not only a detailed and layered description of Shambhala but also a profound teaching on the nature of karma and the fundamental method for engaging in spiritual practice.

As a result of these initial discussions, we published the first edition of this book in 2016 through the Tibetan Buddhist Rime Institute under the title *Demystifying Shambhala*. Since then, Rinpoche has continued to travel around the globe numerous times, refining his presentation of Shambhala and listening to the generous feedback he has received from his students. At the urging of some close students, we submitted our manuscript to Shambhala

Publications and were delighted by the reception that the book received. Those who are familiar with the previous version will notice a number of key changes in the structure and content. These are a result of working closely with the wonderful editorial staff at Shambhala. I believe that, due to their thoughtful comments and ideas, we have arrived at a version of this book that is focused, accessible, and, in general, much more cohesive.

In the first chapter, “Myths of Shambhala,” you will be introduced to a wide range of interpretations of the concept of Shambhala. From this general survey, you will get a sense for why there is so much confusion regarding the topic. With so many different perspectives floating around, it is difficult to distinguish which interpretation is most beneficial to rely on.

For this reason, in “The Four Reliances” Rinpoche provides commentary to a short teaching by the Buddha that clearly establishes a set of criteria that can be used to evaluate the relevance of a particular view. In this way, he shows how you can focus your attention on the interpretation that has the greatest short- and long-term benefit to your life.

However, before diving into the essence of what Shambhala is, you will first need to set up a theoretical understanding of how Shambhala is possible. For this, you will need to understand the concept of karma and how it drives the manifestation of our reality. In chapter 3, “Realms of Opportunity,” Rinpoche introduces how karmic propensities and karmic connections work together to form realms of experience that are particularly suited for the realization of Shambhala.

Then, in chapter 4, “Manifestations of Shambhala,” you will learn how the experience of Shambhala can potentially arise within your individual mindstream. Guiding you through the various levels of your consciousness, Rinpoche will peel away the layers of subtlety and introduce you to the profound nature that abides within each of us.

While the experience of Shambhala is guaranteed to bring greater peace and harmony into your own life, it has much greater

implications for our global society. To demonstrate the transformative power of Shambhala, in chapter 5, “Patterns of Transformation,” Rinpoche presents a brief history of how the realm of Shambhala evolved as a result of the inhabitants’ practice of Kalachakra. Highlighting the important milestones within this process, Rinpoche provides us with a blueprint for how we can replicate this transformation in our own world.

Having provided you with a clear understanding of the nature of Shambhala and the incredible benefits that come from striving to achieve it, Rinpoche then shifts to the practical side of things. In chapter 6, “Discovering the Dharma of Definitive Meaning,” you will learn not only what qualities to look for in the teachings but also why the Kalachakra teachings as taught within the Jonang tradition are uniquely suited for connecting with Shambhala.

Then, in chapter 7, “Experiencing Shambhala in Your Life,” Rinpoche provides multiple strategies for how to approach your personal practice in order to experience the aspects of Shambhala. You will learn that there are always opportunities for you to take advantage of, no matter the scope of your aspirations or the level of your practice.

Finally, in chapter 8, “Toward a Golden Age,” Rinpoche looks to the future and the potential that we all have the capacity to realize. Clarifying the prophecies found in the *Kalachakra Tantra*, Rinpoche lays out a vision for how we can all work together to overcome our afflictions and usher in a golden age of peace and harmony.

As you will hopefully come to see after reading this book, the secret teachings of Shambhala are inseparable from the teachings of Kalachakra. To fully understand one, you must understand the other. Since these teachings are most fully preserved within the lineage of the Jonang tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, it is very important for anyone interested in manifesting Shambhala to develop their connection with this tradition. To this end, we have included an extensive history of the Jonang tradition as appendices to this book. By learning about the life stories of these incredible practitioners who dedicated their lives to the cultivation of Shambhala, we hope

that your mind will be inspired and that you will be moved to follow in their footsteps.

I feel incredibly honored to have had this opportunity to work alongside Khentrul Rinpoche in order to give shape to these extraordinary teachings. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to him for his unwavering patience in the face of my endless questions and for the daily inspiration I receive from his tireless enthusiasm for the Dharma. I cannot begin to describe the benefit I have experienced from his wise and compassionate guidance.

I would also like to acknowledge the kind support of the community here in Belgrave that has made it possible for this project to manifest. I would especially like to thank Vanessa Mason for her dedicated help in editing the early manuscript. As for the team at Shambhala Publications, I would like to thank Nikko Odiseos for supporting the project and Casey Kemp for her invaluable suggestions and guidance.

As with all our books, we consider this title to be a work in progress. We are therefore always looking for feedback that can help us make them better. While you are reading, if you find anything you feel is unclear or could be improved, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us and share your thoughts. I have tried my best to be as faithful as possible to the teachings I have received from Rinpoche, but unfortunately, I am limited in my capacity and, therefore, I apologize if any errors or distortions have been introduced due to my own faults.

May the merits that have been generated through the process of writing this book become the cause for the peace and harmony of Shambhala to blossom within the hearts of each and every being on this planet, may we all make strong connections with authentic spiritual masters who can guide us on the Kalachakra path, and may this book become a cause for those who read it to be born into a sublime golden age that is free from suffering and conflict.

Ven. Tenpa'i Gyaltsen
Belgrave, Australia

Introduction

In order to identify actual solutions to the world's problems, we first need to look closely at their causes. On a superficial level, war appears to be caused by violence, famine by lack of food, natural disasters by the elements, poverty by a lack of resources, and sickness by imbalances in the body. While these may all be powerful conditions, I would not say they are the primary causes. At the root of all of these problems is, in fact, a particular state of mind that creates the conditions for each form of suffering to arise.

Take, for instance, the problem of war. While there can be many types of motivation for one group of people to engage in violence against another, a very common attitude is the desire for more power or resources. This desire can be so great, people are willing to kill to get what they want. Imagine what would happen if that desire disappeared. What would happen if the same people were content with what they had and chose to honor the rights of their neighbors? In this way, the primary causes of war are states of mind such as greed, fear, intolerance, and hatred.

Now, consider something like natural disasters. These are forces of nature that can rarely be predicted with accuracy and cannot be controlled. When a tsunami hits or the earth shakes, we are often left helpless in the face of massive destruction. However, most of what we experience is a direct result of the attitude we have developed toward our environment. Over the last few centuries, rather than working in harmony with our surroundings, we have been focused on taking what we want in order to fulfill our substantial desires. The

more we take, the more the system is thrown out of sync and thus the more extreme the results we experience when it inevitably tries to correct itself. Imagine what would happen if our attitude shifted and we developed greater humility and love for our planet. What would happen if we put aside our motivation of greed and focused our efforts on bringing balance back into the system?

As we can see from these few examples, none of the problems we experience are happening in isolation. The way we think is the primary cause for how we act, and it is our actions that give rise to the conditions for suffering and conflict. This means that each and every one of us has both the capacity and the responsibility to ensure that we do not cultivate states of mind that promote these unwanted results. We have the power to overcome our limitations and manifest a world that accords with our deepest desire for lasting and genuine happiness. In order to do this, though, we need to take a long and hard look at the habits we have formed that prevent us from moving forward.

A Problem of Extremes

In my book *Ocean of Diversity,* I present a broad overview of the history, beliefs, and practices of some of the major belief systems in our world. One of the benefits of taking such a broad view is that it makes it possible to see different patterns emerge. While each tradition developed unique characteristics, this was generally a result of their interactions and relationships with other traditions. None of them developed in total isolation.

Over time, two extreme views have emerged that dominate much of the thinking within the modern world. As these views became increasingly polarized, they tended to group people into two camps, with each side thinking, “You are either with us or against us.” It is this attitude of extreme bias that I would argue fuels many of the conflicts that we see so much of today.

The first extreme view is known as scientific materialism. This view holds that reality is purely physical in nature and, therefore, that everything there is to be known can be known through using scientific methods. It is closely tied to the understanding of the universe as presented by classical physics, in which the universe is a finite and fixed system that is mechanistic in nature. Phenomena exist objectively and can be fully understood through the logic and reasoning of our human intellect.

As a hypothesis, this way of thinking has been the foundation for many amazing discoveries, allowing modern culture to harness the power of the physical universe to achieve truly extraordinary results. Over the last few centuries alone, we have seen an explosion of technology and scientific progress unlike anything this planet has ever experienced. Such progress, however, has come at a cost.

With such a heavy focus on a materialistic understanding of the universe, we have inadvertently limited ourselves to a very small portion of reality. We have boxed ourselves in, choosing to ignore everything that doesn't fit within that box. Because we have had such success using our intellects, we have come to believe that this is all there is and that everything we experience can be quantified into data that can be measured and studied. When we encounter something that doesn't correspond with this physical model, it is labeled as "metaphysical" and subsequently ignored.

The end result of this extreme form of tunnel vision is that human beings are reduced to mechanistic entities operating under deterministic principles. It is this type of thinking that allows one group of people to completely objectify another, dehumanizing them to such a degree that acts of violence and exploitation become legitimate. It is a consumer mentality in which people become objects to be used and thrown away when they are no longer capable of creating value for society. This mentality has dominated most of the industrialized world for the last hundred years.

One of the more destructive side effects of an extreme materialistic view has been the equally extreme position that developed within many religious groups. This view identifies itself in opposition to

science, claiming that scientific materialism has been responsible for the ethical degeneration of our world. For this group, modern society is essentially seen to be corrupt and, therefore, must be abandoned. We can call this second form of extreme view religious extremism.

Like scientific materialism, this view is based on a very restricted understanding of reality. Instead of reliance on the intellect, there is an unshakable faith in a particular view of how reality exists. Within the teachings of these religions, all truth is known and so there is no need to look beyond the teachings. Anyone who does not agree with those beliefs is generally seen as someone who must be converted or else as an enemy of the faith.

A result of this type of extreme focus is the tendency for people to develop a very literal interpretation of the teachings they follow. Rather than cultivating a deeper understanding by actively questioning and reflecting on the teachings, they take everything at face value and subsequently become fixated on superficial ideas. This inflexibility of thought promotes intolerance toward others and creates the conditions for conflict to arise.

I am not saying that the principles of science and religious belief are a problem in and of themselves. What I am saying is that any belief system, when viewed from an extreme perspective, will have a polarizing effect. Such perspectives create a spectrum of belief that pushes outward, dividing everything into two sides. The more polarized one becomes, the less value is placed on the view of the opposing side and the less one is able to relate to the people holding those beliefs.

Fortunately, the reverse is also true. The more we move toward the center of this spectrum, the more we are able to incorporate both sides into a cohesive unity. We begin to realize that the division between us and them is an artificial one and that such a division only functions to limit our capacity both as individuals and as a society.

Finding a Middle Ground

How can we shift our focus away from extreme views toward a more balanced approach to life—one that has the capacity to deliver the genuine happiness we are all searching for? To answer this question, we need to rely on wisdom that specifically addresses this problem. A powerful source of such wisdom can be found in the teachings of the *Kalachakra Tantra*. To understand how this ancient tradition is particularly well suited for this task, it may be helpful to discuss the context in which it arose and developed. One reason for the present polarization of views in society is that Western science evolved into a countermovement to the views held within the Christian church of Europe. Although it hasn't always been the case, science has come to be seen as the opposite of religion. This split, however, did not evolve in all parts of the world. In many Eastern countries, intellectual and spiritual endeavors were seen as complementary techniques for developing greater wisdom about our nature and the nature of the world we live in.

In ancient India, we find a vibrant example of the great diversity of thought that arose from the interaction between these two components. While some systems tended to favor one approach, there was still a general recognition of the validity of both sides. This mutual respect and tolerance created the conditions for people to explore their ideas and push the boundaries of what was possible.

Within this context, the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, recognized that holding extreme views of any description limited one's experience and acted as an obstacle for achieving lasting genuine happiness. On the basis of his observations, he developed a Middle Way philosophy that found the balance between the extremes of eternalism (projecting fantasies) and nihilism (denying reality). Through his profound insight, Siddhartha was able to attain the highest level of realization regarding how reality exists and thus became a fully enlightened being.

As the teachings of the Buddha took root in India, they evolved through a process of intensive refinement in which generations of scholars and practitioners debated and tested their views of reality. In time, the great monastic university of Nalanda arose, where the

Buddha's Middle Way philosophy was perfected into an integrated study of inner and outer sciences, producing a robust science of the mind. In this way, the distinction between faith and reason was completely dissolved, and a balanced unity was achieved.

Through the power of their integrated approach, Buddhist practitioners were able to explore increasingly subtle levels of their experience. As they did so, they began to develop the capacity to understand more of the profound meaning presented by the Buddha in both his exoteric (sutra) and esoteric (tantra) teachings. Due to the remarkable efficiency of the tantric approach, Buddhist tantra grew in popularity and became more widely practiced, producing a wealth of *mahasiddhas,* practitioners of great accomplishment.

Within this environment of profound realization, the *Kalachakra Tantra* was finally introduced into India. The teachings of the Kalachakra were quickly recognized to be a uniquely powerful system of practice for bringing about an exceptional level of peace and harmony. It is said in the accounts of early masters in both the Dro and Ra lineages of Kalachakra that by the end of the tenth century, there were more mahasiddhas produced through the practices of the Kalachakra than through all of the other systems combined.

Three things differentiate the Kalachakra from other systems of Buddhist tantra. The first is its expansive scope. Within a single source, there are detailed explanations of a variety of scientific subjects such as cosmology, astrology, medicine, psychology, and philosophy. In many ways, the Kalachakra is a "theory of everything." The second is its remarkably clear presentation. In other tantras, the more profound the wisdom, the more hidden and symbolic the language becomes. The Kalachakra reverses that relationship, providing detailed and clear descriptions of the deepest levels of primordial wisdom. The third aspect is the profound methods it contains for achieving the direct realization of the ultimate nature of reality. While some systems tend to emphasize the method aspect of working with the pure forms of deities, others emphasize the wisdom aspect of cultivating increasing degrees of blissful awareness. The Kalachakra finds a balance between these

two. It is considered nondual in its approach, because it emphasizes these two aspects of method and wisdom as an inseparable union. For all of these reasons, the Kalachakra became known as the king of all tantras.

At its core, the Kalachakra offers a powerful method for reconciling apparently contradictory ideas and removing all limitations. Through a middle-way approach, it is uniquely positioned to act as a bridge for the many extremist views that dominate our world. As we will see in the coming chapters, the way forward is not black and white, good versus evil. It is the appreciation of an infinite display of diversity arising out of a pervasive unity with our own enlightened nature. Kalachakra is the method for realizing this reality and, therefore, provides a key to open the door for Shambhala to manifest fully within our own experience.

Developing a Meaningful Understanding of Shambhala

In some cases, *Shambhala* is the term used to refer to the realm that was the source for the Kalachakra teachings, while in others it refers to a state of mind that is experienced by an individual. It is important to keep this distinction in mind throughout this book, as it will help to avoid any unnecessary confusion. Depending on the context, the meaning of *Shambhala* will change.

While an understanding of where the Shambhala teachings come from can be helpful for inspiring the mind, it can also lead to developing a fixed view about how it does and does not exist. Our minds tend to grab on to specific descriptions, limiting them to being just one thing and not another. By bringing our attention to the essential nature of Shambhala, we can begin to expand our understanding of the many ways it can potentially manifest. We can also gain insight into how Shambhala is relevant to our present and future situations. For this reason, of the two aspects, a realm versus a state of mind, we will be focusing primarily on the meaning of the

second—Shambhala as a state of mind that can be cultivated through the practice of a spiritual path.

I believe that taking this approach will be more helpful for us in the long term, as it assists us in developing a meaningful aspiration for how to live. Through this aspiration, we can engage in actions that ultimately bring greater benefit to both ourselves and others. We can begin our exploration of this topic by first establishing a simple definition for what Shambhala actually is.

In a very basic way, we can say Shambhala is the perfection of peace and harmony. The word *peace* here refers to our own personal experience. It is a lasting state of genuine happiness, free from all forms of suffering. The word *harmony* refers to the natural expression of that peace in connection with our environment and relationship with others. It is a state in which there is a complete absence of conflict, spontaneously free from contradiction and separation.

Shambhala is a *perfection* in that it is the ultimate manifestation of peace and harmony. It is the realization of the maximum potential of those two qualities and the revelation of their innate capacity. Like the sun hidden behind clouds, every so often we can catch a glimpse of its dazzling rays. Similarly, the full radiance of Shambhala is normally hidden from us. And yet, under the right conditions, it is possible to experience an aspect of its light. With the right methods, those conditions can be strengthened, revealing increasingly more of its essence. Relatively speaking, this perfection is achieved in a gradual manner. Ultimately, though, these qualities are already perfect; we simply need to clear away the clouds so the sun can shine in all of its splendor.

If this is the case, what limits Shambhala from manifesting fully? For simplicity's sake, we can speak of two major obstacles. The first is our own ignorance regarding the nature of reality. From this lack of awareness, we create the conditions for the second obstacle to manifest: a biased mind. This is a dualistic mind that grasps on to phenomena and labels them as being good, bad, or neutral. On the basis of these relationships, we develop attachment for what we

perceive as good, aversion for what we perceive as bad, and indifference for what we perceive as neutral. The nature of a biased mind is separation and, therefore, it serves to isolate us as individuals and condition our experience.

Together, bias and ignorance seem like an insurmountable barrier, preventing us from experiencing the fullness of Shambhala. The more disconnected we are, the more we lose sight of our true nature and the more limited is our experience of peace and harmony. The more we limit our view, the more ignorant we become, and so we are unable to grasp the incredible potential we all have, like a great treasure buried beneath a poor man's house.

Fortunately, this barrier is not insurmountable. It can be overcome through the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion. While loving-kindness is the aspiration for beings to experience happiness, compassion is the aspiration for beings to be free from suffering. Since these basic aspirations are shared by all beings, they are able to function as a basis for developing positive connections between us. As we strengthen these connections, we reduce the separating effects of bias and are able to open our hearts to subtler levels of experience. With the broadening of our scope, we develop greater wisdom, which in turn clears away the layers of our ignorance.

We can see these principles in action by imagining two families. In the first, there is very little love and compassion. All members are focused almost entirely on their own desires and consequently rarely even consider the other members of the family. As a result of their self-centered attitudes, they constantly fight with each other, leaving them miserable and dysfunctional.

Now, compare this with a family in which each member sincerely cares about the welfare of the others. With loving-kindness, they go out of their way to create the conditions for the happiness of others. Meanwhile, their compassion keeps them mindful of how their actions may affect the people around them. Through developing an other-centered attitude, the result is a family that is peaceful and all members are able to live in harmony with one another.

While the experience of this family's peace and harmony is not a fully qualified manifestation of Shambhala, it is an example of a Shambhala-like experience. It is a partial aspect of Shambhala, manifesting in the day-to-day lives of those individuals. Any method that helps cultivate loving-kindness and compassion can be said to contribute to the realization of Shambhala. However, the degree to which Shambhala is able to manifest will depend entirely on the level of wisdom being used. The more profound the wisdom, the more complete the manifestation.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to share these most precious teachings with you. To encounter them is something truly rare. It is my sincere aspiration that they will inspire you to strive toward achieving your greatest potential and to one day manifest the blazing brilliance of Shambhala within your own experience.

1

Myths of Shambhala

The legend of Shambhala has existed in this world for thousands of years. Recounted in our stories and immortalized in our literature, its name has inspired the imaginations of countless people. And yet, despite how far the legend has spread, little is known about what Shambhala actually is. This lack of knowledge has led to various interpretations that have arisen over the years, making it easy to get confused about which ones can be relied upon. In order to overcome this confusion, we need to develop a discriminating wisdom that is able to clearly distinguish between the many seemingly contradictory perspectives. On the basis of such wisdom, we can then establish criteria for what is authentic and reliable.

In this chapter, we will explore the various ideas connected with Shambhala in both the traditional cultures of central Asia and, more recently, in Western cultures. Our purpose here is to develop greater clarity so we can understand how the Kalachakra perspective is unique. At this stage, I am not concerned with debating the benefit of one interpretation over another. In the coming chapters we will have plenty of time to identify their benefits and limitations. For now, we will focus on simply identifying the range of views that exist.

The Legends of Central Asia

Central Asia is renowned for its striking and varied landscape. Filled with towering mountains, endless hidden valleys, desolate plains, and raging rivers, this diverse geography has given rise to an assortment of cultures, each with its own history, myths, and legends. From this vast cultural richness, the first whispers of the incredible land of Shambhala can be heard. At this level, Shambhala is thought of mostly as a physical realm located in time and space—a lost kingdom of ancient wisdom.

Given the great distance and natural barriers separating these cultures, the sheer consistency of their legends is quite remarkable. The recollections of similar descriptions and themes led many to believe that all refer to the same place. As much of the information regarding the origins of these stories has been lost over time, it is very hard to know for sure. This, however, has not prevented their narratives from capturing the imaginations of the people of central Asia and beyond for thousands of years. Three common themes have emerged from these diverse narratives: the hidden paradise, the sacred mountain, and the messianic prophecy.

The Hidden Paradise

Many cultures describe a kingdom or realm isolated from the rest of the world, one that can only be reached after traveling great distances across challenging terrain. For instance, the ancient nomadic Scythians speak of a place of enchantment situated to the far north. To reach there, one must undertake a long and arduous journey, passing through the territories of various tribes into a virtually impassable icy wasteland. Those who succeed are rewarded for their efforts by arriving in a paradise protected from the bitter cold and freezing winds just beyond its borders.

Likewise, within some parts of Russia, there is the legend of a land known as Belovodye (meaning “White Waters” or “White Mountains”) believed to be somewhere within the Altai Mountains. In one famous story, a Russian monk named Father Sergei, together with over three hundred men, traveled over great mountain ranges,

across an endless desert, and through a labyrinth of valley pathways. Over time, all of his men were either overcome by the elements or gave up and turned back. It is said that Father Sergei alone had the determination and faith necessary to find this most elusive of kingdoms.

The Sacred Mountain

Another feature common to the central Asian legends is the presence of a sacred mountain upon which lives a highly realized being or a city of enlightened sages. This aspect introduces a spiritual nature to the legends, transforming mere stories of a mysterious geographical region into realms of sacred significance where ancient wisdom is preserved.

In the teachings of the Bon tradition of Zhang Zhung (now part of western Tibet), there are references to the sacred land of Olmo Lungring. At the center of this kingdom is Mount Yungdrung Gutsek, which is divided into nine levels, each representing a different stage of spiritual development within the Bon path. At its peak resides the living source of the Bon teachings, Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche.

Within the Taoist tradition of China, there is the legend of the Kunlun Mountains, home to the Goddess of the West, Xi Wang Mu. It is believed that she lives within a heavenly realm filled with pleasure groves where, every six thousand years, she invites mortal beings to her gardens and offers them the fruit of immortality from her magical plum tree.

The Muslim people of Kyrgyzstan tell a similar story of a mythical city known as Jainadar, situated at the summit of the sacred mountain Mustagh Ata. It is alleged that the remains of over seventy Muslim saints are buried within this mountain. Those who are able to gain access to Jainadar are granted immortal life from the magical fruit that grows there.

The Messianic Prophecy

This last theme refers to the presence of a prophecy describing a future conflict in which an enlightened society must rise up and defeat barbarian forces of ignorance and degenerate views. Following this battle, a golden age of peace and harmony will spread throughout the earth.

In one of the first direct references to Shambhala, the *Kalki Purana* from the Vedic tradition speaks of a time when the populace has become dominated by different forms of materialistic and atheistic beliefs. The god Vishnu will emanate an avatar who is born in the village of Shambhala and will be named Kalki. This Kalki will be responsible for cleansing all of these negative forces and reintroducing the world to authentic spiritual practices. After completing his task, Kalki will return to Shambhala, where he will reign as the king of the world.

Similarly, in the Buddhist tradition, there is a prophecy of the coming of the Buddha Maitreya. Again, after a period of degeneration, the world will be overcome by delusion and extreme ignorance. At this time, the Buddha Maitreya will descend from Tushita Heaven, and through an overwhelming display of his limitless love, the confused beings will follow him on a pure path toward virtue. Thus his coming will usher in a golden age of love and compassion. While many of the legends focus on one or two of these themes, only the tradition of the Kalachakra tantra describes all of them in direct relation to Shambhala. Unlike much of the oral folklore that is available today, there is a significant textual basis for the descriptions of Shambhala as supported by three main texts: the *Abridged Kalachakra Tantra,* its commentary, *Stainless Light,* and a guidebook for traveling to Shambhala known as the *Entrance to Kalapa*. These three texts are believed to have arisen in India sometime around the tenth century and are considered the primary sources of information for much of the present understanding of Shambhala.

Even though the Kalachakra was one of the last systems of Buddhist tantra to be practiced in India, the root text and its commentary state that the teachings had existed in the realm of

Shambhala since the time of the historical Buddha. From this perspective, the texts were first preserved by the Shambhalan kings and then given to Indian sages many centuries later. In addition to the detailed history of Shambhala, they also describe its spiritual views, social structure, and many of its advanced sciences such as astrology, medicine, and various forms of technology. These texts offer a rare glimpse into an ancient culture that may have provided the original inspiration for the diversity of myths and legends throughout the region of central Asia.

A Question of Interpretation

With such rich folklore surrounding Shambhala, it is not surprising that different interpretations that attempt to describe this mysterious realm have also arisen. These views have been closely tied to the particular ways in which certain ideas of Shambhala were introduced to the West. We can see that core themes have been either expanded or condensed to suit the needs of the audience, depending on the interests and motivations of the people responsible for that communication.

To help us gain insight into the essential qualities of these different interpretations, we will divide these views into three main categories: fragmented, conceptual, and experiential. Each represents the nature of the connection between those who hold the view and the information available from the Kalachakra source material (the three main texts referred to previously). Additionally, within each category, the motivation influencing the type of view can also be identified. Nature and motivation therefore form the basic structure for our analysis.

The Fragmented Shambhala

The first category represents the views that arose during the period when the concept of Shambhala was first introduced into the public consciousness of countries outside of central Asia, specifically

Europe, Russia, and the United States. During the nineteenth century, there was very little information available, most of which was unreliable: vague reports from missionaries who had traveled to India or Tibet; and a handful of superficial academic papers based on a fragmented or incomplete understanding, such as the writings of Alexander Csomo de Körös and Emil Schlagintweit. At this level of interpretation, Shambhala was emphasized as a mystical realm of fantasy and folklore.

It is not surprising that this lack of information did little to stop details of the stories from being selected and embellished by several creative people. Completely removed from its original context, the myth of Shambhala offered the perfect backdrop for an array of inspired and compelling ideas. This surge of imagination, however, came about for different reasons. In general, we can speak of three main ways the myth of Shambhala was appropriated: through entertainment, philosophy, and politics.

Entertainment

By the end of the nineteenth century, Europe was becoming increasingly captivated by the mystical myths, stories, and images of exotic cultures from the Far East. There was a growing desire for anything ancient, magical, and foreign. For decades, expeditions had been organized to chart the unknown lands of Africa, the Middle East, India, and Asia. These intrepid explorers would often return with collections of plundered artifacts and accounts of adventure and wonder. Their fanciful tales fueled the imaginations of writers and made their way into popular culture in the form of romanticized novels and plays. These writers used myths like that of Shambhala as the basic premise for building their own narratives in works of pure fiction.

Perhaps one of the most widely known adaptations of the myth of Shambhala in Western culture can be found in the fictional novel *Lost Horizon,* written by James Hilton in 1933. Loosely drawing from the different themes of Shambhala, Hilton weaves the tale of a

British diplomat named Hugh Conway who travels to the secret city of Shangri-La, nestled deep within the Himalayas. There, Conway meets a race of extremely long-lived beings who attempt to recruit him to join their enlightened society. Written in the years leading up to the Second World War, the story makes allusions to the inevitability of a cataclysmic conflict. The "Lamasery" of Shangri-La is designed as a safe haven for the antiquities of the world, protecting them from the coming destruction so they can be revealed once again in the future.

Lost Horizon was one of the first paperback novels in the world to be mass produced and millions of copies were printed, making it one of the most popular and widely read books of the twentieth century. It was later adapted into several feature films, along with numerous shows for radio and theater. Even though the motivation behind its success was entirely worldly in nature, its popularity is an indication of the deep resonance that this story has with the minds of people. All of this has resulted in the name Shangri-La becoming deeply ingrained within many Western cultures. For many, the word is synonymous with the notion of ancient "oriental" mysticism and a lost Himalayan paradise on earth.

Philosophy

While Hilton's vision of Shambhala was surely the most widespread, it was a late interpretation constructed from the teachings of various nineteenth century occultists such as Alexandre Saint-Yves and Madame Helena Blavatsky. While Hilton's motivation was primarily to entertain his audience, Saint-Yves and Blavatsky were exploring the philosophical connections they could make between their own occult theories and the ancient civilizations presented within the folklore of central Asia.

Saint-Yves was the first to popularize the concept of a Shambhala-like kingdom known as Agarthi for a European audience. Agarthi is described as a hidden realm that existed underground in a series of caverns beneath Tibet. Saint-Yves believed it was home to an

enlightened society of sages that operated a world government based on the concept of synarchy. This philosophy was considered to be an ideal form of government that relied heavily on the notion of an organic unity capable of producing a harmonious society. While Saint-Yves never explicitly connected Agarthi to Shambhala, many would later equate the two due to the similarity of themes presented in both myths.

Another major influence of the occult regarding Shambhala was the Russian-German mystic and author Madame Helena Blavatsky. Unlike Saint-Yves, Blavatsky weaved many fragments of the original source material into her writings. In her influential work *The Secret Doctrine,* Blavatsky combines these views with Hindu and occult sources to present a unified esoteric philosophy that positions Shambhala as the primary holder of the world's wisdom. Her discourse drew from the idea that all religious thought is derived from a single ancient wisdom religion that represents the most secret of truths (hence the title). It is this premise of a common source of wisdom that allowed her to connect Shambhala back to lost civilizations such as Atlantis and Lemuria.

Later on, in Russia, Helena Roerich produced a translation of Blavatsky's text. This translation became the primary source for the philosophy she developed with her husband, Nicholas Roerich. In addition to Blavatsky's work, the Roerichs were also exposed to the Shambhala myth by way of a Kalachakra temple that was built by a Mongolian monk in St. Petersburg and also texts such as the third Panchen Lama's *Guidebook to Shambhala.* It was these two sources that inspired them to travel extensively throughout Tibet and parts of India in search of the lost kingdom.

Inspired by their experiences in Tibet, Helena Roerich went on to introduce Western society to *agni yoga*—a practice that presented the idea of fire as an elemental source of purification. Her teachings explored the relationship between light and darkness. In this context, light was associated with the aspect of fire and could be used to purify the world of darkness, which was associated with wrong views and confusion. The Roerichs emphasized Shambhala's role in this

coming battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. It should be noted that she also clarified the relationship between Shambhala and Agarthi, acknowledging that while they were connected, from her perspective, they referred to two separate places.

In Austria, one of Blavatsky's students, Rudolf Steiner, also chose to emphasize the theme of a battle between light and dark. While the Roerichs integrated this theme with ideas drawn primarily from Hinduism and Buddhism, Steiner also added elements from Zoroastrianism and Christianity. In his writings, the forces of light are led by the angel of light, Lucifer (literally meaning "light-bearer"), and the forces of darkness are led by Ahriman. In Steiner's version of Shambhala, the messiah will emerge in the form of Maitreya and will spread the purified teachings of Christ.

In the United States, the British Theosophist Alice Bailey continued the themes first established by Blavatsky and Steiner. In 1920, she founded the Lucifer Trust, which provided a platform for teachings she claimed to have received telepathically from a Tibetan lama known simply as D.K. Like Steiner, she emphasized the battle between light and dark and also introduced the idea of a Shambhala force, a neutral and yet highly volatile energy that could be harnessed for good or evil. Through channeling the power of this force, Shambhala would purify the world of degenerate teachings and usher in a golden age of peace and prosperity known as the Aquarian Age. It was these teachings that gave rise to the popular New Age movement.

Politics

Through the fictional and philosophical writings circulating throughout Europe, Russia, and the United States, the myth of Shambhala fractured into a number of versions that differed significantly from its original form. While these writings raised awareness about Shambhala, they also introduced significant distortions that bred confusion and opened the door for the myth to

be appropriated by different groups in order to serve their political aims.

Perhaps one of the earliest examples of Shambhala being used as justification for a political relationship involved the previously mentioned temple in St. Petersburg. Around the late 1800s, the monk Agvan Dorjiev attempted to form an alliance between Russia and Tibet. He believed such an alliance was crucial to protecting Tibet from attack by the Chinese to the east and the British to the south. After convincing the thirteenth Dalai Lama that Russia itself was the mythical land of Shambhala and that the czar of Russia was a descendant of the Dharma kings of Shambhala, Dorjiev traveled to St. Petersburg and tried unsuccessfully to sway the Russian ruler to join forces with Tibet. While he was not able to realize his vision of unification, Dorjiev's efforts did lead to the construction of the Kalachakra temple, where Nicholas Roerich was employed as a painter.

When the Russian Revolution of 1917 plunged Russia into civil war, the White Czarists faced off against the Red Communists. After leading the White Army in Siberia, the anti-Bolshevik general Baron von Ungern-Sternberg led his troops into Inner Mongolia to drive out the Chinese occupying the region. In the process, he earned himself the nickname "The Bloody Baron" due to his notorious cruelty toward the Chinese and their Mongolian, Russian, and Jewish collaborators.

In the face of continued atrocities, the Mongolian Communist Provisional Government was founded in order to stop Ungern-Sternberg. To help rally the Mongolian troops against the brutal invader, the Mongolian leader Sukhe Batur invoked the popular legend of Shambhala. He told his troops that by fighting on the side of the Mongolian communists, they would be creating the causes to be reborn on the side of Shambhala at the time of the great war that would usher in a golden age. With the help of the Soviet Red Army, Batur was able to capture Ungern and establish the new Mongolian capital of Ulaan Baatar. Since then, Shambhala became closely associated with communist ideals.

Before his capture, the Baron, who was fascinated by the esoteric beliefs of the Far East, had sent numerous expeditions to Outer Mongolia in search of the underground kingdom of Agarthi. Ungern envisaged an alliance with Agarthi to help him overcome the Bolsheviks. It was these expeditions that first introduced the notion that the kingdoms of Shambhala and Agarthi were opposing forces. This idea would later be taken up by the Nazi Party in Germany.

Before the start of the Second World War, a secret group named the Thule Society was formed in Germany in order to study the occult. The group claimed that the German people were descendants of a master race that originated in a mythical northern kingdom known as Thule. This society was the main sponsor for the political organization that was later transformed into the National Socialist Party by Adolf Hitler. While the Thule society dissolved before Hitler came to power, ideologies that the society promoted lingered on, having an important influence on many of Hitler's policies.

As Europe once again became the center for a world war, Hitler found himself under assault from all sides. Allegedly, some members of Hitler's inner circle who still had strong ties to the occult wanted to legitimize their claims of racial supremacy by promoting the idea that the Third Reich was connected to the myths of Shambhala and Agarthi. They appear to have believed that both of these civilizations were descended from the Aryan people of the lost kingdom of Thule and could provide the missing link they needed. To this end, it is believed the Nazis dispatched multiple expeditions to Tibet in search of these mythical lands under the leadership of Karl Haushofer.

While the accuracy of their research may be questionable, scholars such as Louis Pauwels, Jacques Bergier, and Jean-Claude Frére popularized the view that Haushofer initially sought to form an alliance with Shambhala but was rejected. He then sought out Agarthi, which is said to have accepted. One possible way to interpret the claim of these scholars is by thinking of it symbolically, where Shambhala is associated with communism and Agarthi with anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic ideologies. From this perspective, Nazi Germany first tried to create an alliance with the Soviet Union

(Shambhala), which ultimately failed with the breaking of the Soviet-Nazi Pact. This was then followed by their successful alliance with Japan (Agarthi) through the Anti-Comintern Pact. It was this alliance that allowed them to wage war against the Soviet Union. If this were the case, Shambhala would simply be a label used to present the Nazi political strategies in an epic and mythical way.

Through the strong polarities of good and evil emphasized so heavily within the occult communities, these popular conceptions of Shambhala became the basis for the attempted legitimization of numerous violent conflicts during the first half of the twentieth century. This is one of the main reasons why it is so important to develop clarity regarding the differences between the original teachings of Shambhala as they are presented within the *Kalachakra Tantra* and the fragmented and distorted views popularized in the last hundred years.

The Conceptual Shambhala

Next, we will turn our attention toward the views that developed within the region of central Asia itself. As we have already discussed, there were many similar legends present in different countries at different times, but only one source provides direct insight into the culture of Shambhala. That is the *Kalachakra Tantra*.

In the appendices to this book, I provide a detailed account of how the Kalachakra teachings were introduced to India, spread into Tibet, and then eventually reached the rest of the world. For now, it is sufficient to simply note that for more than a thousand years the Kalachakra teachings have been upheld primarily in Tibet, and it is within the Tibetan culture that the ideas related with Kalachakra and Shambhala have been most extensively developed.

In general, there are two ways that we can know something: either indirectly through a concept or directly through experience. It is the former that brings us to the second category of interpretation—the conceptual Shambhala. Here we will focus on the ideas of Shambhala that have developed through conceptual understanding. These are

derived primarily from studying the root texts of the Kalachakra tradition and their commentaries. We can again divide this view into three groups: cultural, academic, and spiritual.

Cultural

Of all the tantric systems practiced in India, the Kalachakra was arguably the most widespread. In a very short time, it generated a number of lineages, each of which found its way to Tibet. The Kalachakra was universally respected and practiced by all major Tibetan traditions, and its fame spread throughout the country.

One of the main factors that contributed to this prevalence was the practice of high lamas giving Kalachakra empowerments in public. Generally speaking, an empowerment is a ritual that is performed as a means to initiate practitioners into the practice of working with a meditational deity—a symbolic representation of one's pure nature. In other systems, this sort of ritual is normally restricted to a handful of dedicated practitioners and given in private. However, in addition to this more esoteric purpose, the Kalachakra empowerment has also been used as a way of strengthening karmic connections with the kingdom of Shambhala. For this reason, both the general public and dedicated practitioners are given equal opportunity to receive the empowerment, some for practice and some for the blessings it bestows on their minds.

Through exposure to the empowerment ceremony, the general public began to develop a very superficial understanding of Kalachakra. While most had little or no chance to study the teachings, they did develop great faith in the potency of the teachings and the importance of connecting with Shambhala. This faith has become so strongly embedded in Tibetan culture that even today people will travel great distances in order to attend a Kalachakra empowerment.

For those who hold this view, Shambhala is seen as a pure land, similar to a heaven or spiritual paradise, filled with enlightened beings. They see Kalachakra as a very high practice with a power that

guarantees one to be born during the golden age when Shambhala rules the world. At this level, there is often little understanding of how this will happen; many participants only know that it is beneficial to attend the empowerment. Such people will often hang Kalachakra symbols in their homes as protection against harm.

Academic

While the Kalachakra has been studied for many centuries in Tibet, it has only recently begun to emerge in the rest of the world. For the last hundred or so years, the primary relationship the West has had with Kalachakra has been through the academic research of Western scholars. Unlike their Tibetan counterparts, their interest in Kalachakra and Shambhala has been largely historical in nature, focusing almost entirely on documenting the evolution of the textual tradition and its impact on the societies in which it was found.

This “fact-based” approach has led many scholars to develop a rather literal understanding of the texts as they attempt to fit the historical accounts of Shambhala into a fixed narrative of events in central Asia without fully adopting the philosophical perspective of the source material itself. As a result, various theories have arisen that equate Shambhala with different ancient civilizations for which historical records are available. For example, some believe Shambhala may have been linked to the Persian Empire, while others hypothesize that it was a precursor to cultures that settled in the Indus valley. Even though it is easy to offer theories, it is virtually impossible to find substantial proof to support these claims, especially since the nature of Shambhala defies any form of analysis rooted in materialistic bias.

As scholars attempted to match events described within the *Kalachakra Tantra* with events from the history of the region, various theories were developed for how to interpret the prophecies that are found in the texts. These prophecies speak of a coming conflict between the armies of Shambhala and those who follow a barbarian dharma. Generally speaking, scholars identify this war as a

reference to the incursions in India by Muslim armies from the west. From this, a few scholars are led to the conclusion that such prophecies were used as a way of uniting the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain populations against these invading forces. Unfortunately, this interpretation has led some to believe that the Kalachakra is anti-Islamic in nature, which demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the intent of the authentic teachings. I will look at this issue in greater detail in the discussion of the Shambhala prophecies at the end of this book.

Spiritual

In the previous two groups, we can see two extreme views. On one side, there are people who have deep faith in the Kalachakra (and by extension, Shambhala), but virtually no understanding of what the teachings actually say. On the other, there are those who have little faith in the truth of the teachings and instead analyze them as cultural artifacts that can be used to reveal insight into associated civilizations. While the first results in a very simple conceptual model of Kalachakra, the second results in a very fixed interpretation that limits the potential of the teachings to reveal a deeper understanding of reality.

This third group represents those who study the Kalachakra texts within the context of a larger desire for spiritual development. These scholar-practitioners have some faith in the content of the texts and their analysis is focused more on understanding what the texts mean both literally and symbolically.

While there are some Tibetan scholars who study and practice Kalachakra, most read the texts in order to expand their understanding of other systems of Buddhist practice. They study Kalachakra because the Kalachakra is significantly more extensive and clearer than other tantric systems. While very profound concepts are often cryptic and condensed in other systems, the Kalachakra goes into great detail, making it ideal for research.

Another reason why the Kalachakra is often studied is its extensive presentation of various sciences such as astronomy, astrology, and medicine. The Kalachakra system is used throughout Tibet as the basis for the lunar calendar and calculation of karmically significant conditions.

These different motivations cause very little emphasis to be placed on developing a deeper understanding of the experience of Shambhala because those sections appear to be relevant only to those who are personally practicing the Kalachakra system. For this reason, most Tibetan scholars have just as literal an interpretation of Shambhala as their Western counterparts. The difference is that they are generally not concerned with fitting Shambhala into a broader historical context. Instead, they simply accept the descriptions of the history and geography of Shambhala as how the realm exists and leave it at that.

The Experiential Shambhala

We now move to the final category of interpretation through which Shambhala has come to be understood. The emphasis here shifts toward interpretations that are specifically designed to lead to an actual experience of Shambhala through spiritual practice. These views each provide a mixture of theoretical and practical understandings that are integrated within a spiritual motivation to achieve greater peace and harmony for oneself and others. When we look at the scope of motivation that falls into this category, we can speak of three groups of practitioners: symbolic, devotional, and yogic.

Symbolic

This first type is based on a recognition of the underlying principles of peace and harmony that are present within the teachings of Shambhala. Here, the emphasis is on how to use those principles in order to produce an enlightened society modeled on the traditional myth. Through working with Shambhala as a metaphor, one is able

to identify abstract concepts that can be put into a system of practice that is particularly relevant for a specific time and place.

A good example of this is the Shambhala Training of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Instead of relying solely on the traditional sources of Kalachakra, this system of practice is inspired by a description of Shambhala presented within treasure teachings revealed by Trungpa himself. This type of teaching emerges from the spiritual realizations of the master who reveals it and presents a visionary experience or a moment of particular inspiration. In this case, Trungpa was known in Tibet from his early years to have had visions of Shambhala in which he was given teachings by its kings. A portion of these teachings were then synthesized into the Shambhala Training program, incorporating ideas from the *Kalachakra Tantra,* ideas drawn from the epic stories of Gesar of Ling, and new ideas introduced by Trungpa himself.

The most widely known form of Shambhala Training was originally presented as a secular program that focused on the discovery of "basic goodness" as an experience of enlightened mind. He emphasized that this experience is not owned by any one culture or spiritual system but is a fundamental quality of our existence. Living in accordance with basic goodness therefore becomes the ground for creating an enlightened society, a society of peace and harmony that can manifest the vision of Shambhala. Following Trungpa's passing, the Shambhala teachings were later integrated with traditional ideas from Tibetan Buddhism to form a new spiritual system known as Shambhala Buddhism. For the last thirty years, it has been this system of practice that is most widely known in the West in connection with the name Shambhala.

Devotional

The next group refers to those who practice in accordance with the Kalachakra system on the basis of faith. This view is common within the monastic communities of Tibet and particularly within the

Jonang tradition, which specializes in the practice of Kalachakra. It is characterized by a heavy emphasis on ritual and prayer.

For this type of practitioner, there is usually very little understanding of the principles being practiced. Instead, the focus is on creating a strong karmic connection with Kalachakra, ensuring that the practitioner will be reborn in Shambhala or at least during the time of the golden age. It is believed that either of these results will provide the necessary conditions to then engage in the yogic practices of Kalachakra and achieve enlightenment.

At this level, the histories of Shambhala are used as ways of connecting with the central figures of the Kalachakra lineage. These masters function as spiritual role models demonstrating the practitioner's potential. A practitioner will recall them often in order to inspire the mind and strengthen aspiration.

Yogic

Finally, there are those who dedicate themselves to the practice of Kalachakra as a spiritual path. For such practitioners, the motivation is to achieve realization of one's ultimate nature and, therefore, emphasis is placed on removing the causes that mask that nature. This is done through a variety of physical and meditative techniques that bring about a complete transformation of how the practitioner experiences reality.

From this perspective, Shambhala is not merely a realm where one hopes to be reborn in the future. While this result is still possible, the main focus is on understanding how Shambhala manifests within the stream of our own experience, right now, in the present moment. In a sense, we can say that Shambhala is the result of spiritual practice; therefore understanding Shambhala is an important method for focusing our intention and invigorating our spiritual development.

While a fundamental understanding of the methods of Kalachakra is definitely beneficial, the primary conditions for achieving realization are faith in the path, the practical instructions one receives from a teacher, and the determination to put those

instructions into practice. With these three factors, it is possible to transcend one's limitations and experience the reality of Shambhala. For this reason, many realized Kalachakra practitioners may have never even studied the root texts.

An Overview of the Framework

At this point, we have acquired a very broad sense of the general landscape of interpretation that has taken form as people attempt to understand the concept of Shambhala. We can summarize these interpretations into three main types of view: fragmented, conceptual, and experiential. Fragmented views are those that are based on indirect knowledge of the Kalachakra teachings by way of myths and folklore or those that incorporate only portions of the Kalachakra teachings. Conceptual views are those that are based on exposure to or study of the textual sources of Kalachakra without developing an experiential foundation through practice. Finally, experiential views are those that are based on practicing the Kalachakra path or systems that are based on its principles.

As we continue, we will develop a way of evaluating the potential of these views. Our aim at this point is not to assert whether these interpretations are true; rather, it is to recognize the different limitations that exist within certain ways of thinking. If we bring greater awareness to these limitations, we can begin to develop insight to help us overcome them. This will allow us to go beyond superficial understanding and to unveil the deeper significance of Shambhala.

2

The Four Reliances

In any situation where there are multiple options to choose from, the problem of how to make a wise choice arises. As we saw in the previous chapter, there are many ways that we can think about Shambhala. But which of these views will help us to fulfill our aspiration for genuine happiness? How do we know which view to rely on? What criteria can we use to make our decision?

Within the context of our search for the most profound and pervasive expression of peace and harmony, how we understand and relate to Shambhala will directly influence the scope of our activities. If we choose to rely on a limited view, our activities and subsequent experience of Shambhala will also be limited. From this perspective, the aim is to develop a view free of limitation that has the capacity to support our experience on increasingly deeper levels.

To achieve this aim, we will use a powerful method taught by the Buddha in various Mahayana sutras such as the *Sutra of the Teaching of Akshayamati* and the *Sutra of the Questions of the Naga King Anavatapta*. These ideas were then commented on extensively in Asanga's *Foundations of Yogic Practice*. The most essential presentation, however, comes from the *Sutra on the Four Reliances* in which the Buddha teaches a clear system for prioritizing how one should focus in order to penetrate to the most profound level of truth. This teaching acts as a clear reminder of the many

ways we become stuck by creating artificial limitations for ourselves. The text reads:

> Rely on the teaching, not the teacher.
> Rely on the meaning, not the words.
> Rely on the definitive meaning, not the provisional meaning.
> Rely on primordial wisdom, not consciousness.

This teaching was particularly emphasized by the fourteenth-century Kalachakra master Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen. He gave this teaching so often that he became known as "He Who Possesses the Four Reliances." In Dolpopa's view, many of his contemporaries had become so caught up in the conceptual understanding of the ultimate truth that they seemed to have lost sight of the definitive meaning. Through this teaching, he aimed to remind them of the priorities the Buddha himself so clearly presented.

Following in Dolpopa's footsteps, we can use the four reliances to gain insight into the different approaches people have taken to understand Shambhala. It can help to highlight some of the limitations present and provide indications for how to overcome them. In this way, we have an opportunity to create a robust approach that incorporates each of these various levels of understanding.

As we explore the four reliances in isolation, it can be helpful to remember that the structure of each line presents two options: rely on this, not that. This distinction helps to identify that grasping on to the second option limits the realization of the first. Instead, by focusing on the first option, you are able to overcome the limitations of the second. With each line, your view becomes more refined as you recognize subtler forms of grasping that only serve to block your realizations.

Another point to keep in mind is that the teaching of the four reliances does not reject the teacher, the text, the provisional meaning, or consciousness. It instead highlights where to place your

preference. It simply says that "of these two, this one will allow you to go deeper." As we will see, there are many views that can be helpful on a provisional basis. We should therefore be careful not to disregard those views simply because they are limited and may only take us so far. At the same time, by clearly understanding what those limitations are, we can be sure not to hold too tightly to only one way of thinking.

Reliance on the Teachings

The first line of the text says:

> Rely on the teaching, not the teacher.

Take a moment to consider where your understanding of the universe has come from. Have you ever been into space, seen our solar system revolve around the sun, or observed what a quantum particle looks like? For most of us, our knowledge comes from second- or even thirdhand sources, requiring faith in the people who provide us with the information. This, then, begs the question: "Is everything we hear necessarily true?"

For as long as we have had societies, people have shared information. Initially, this referred to things like where the best source of water could be found or how to cultivate particular types of food. This type of information could be tested directly by those receiving it and was shared among a small population such as family members, neighbors, and tribes.

Nowadays, information has become more complicated, more expansive, and more abstract, including vast concepts about the stars and the planets, the origins of the earth, and our place in the universe. In such a context, it is increasingly difficult to evaluate the credibility of our information. Furthermore, instead of reaching only a handful of people, ideas can spread at an amazing speed. The internet and social media have created a forum in which information

can be shared instantaneously worldwide, allowing for ideas to be embraced universally and gain great popularity.

This presents us with a problem. Simply because information is popular does not necessarily make it true. What it does mean, though, is that we are more likely to encounter it on the basis of its reputation. We read a book because the author is considered to be an expert in their field. We see a movie because “everyone” says how great it is. We listen to particular spiritual teachings because the teacher is famous and has many followers. It is reputation that initially draws us toward one source over another. The danger comes from our tendency to grasp on to that reputation as being sufficient grounds for attributing truth. Since there can be many sources and grounds, credible or not, for the attainment of reputation, it is not automatically reliable. Information acquired on the basis of reputation could just as easily guide us toward undesirable outcomes as it could to desirable ones. The results, therefore, are not necessarily predictable or certain.

For these reasons, we must go beyond the limits of reputation alone. We need to make the effort to examine the information we receive in order to determine what is actually being said. When the meaning becomes clear, we can distinguish which ideas are in accordance with reality and which are mere fabrications. Such meaning may not always be immediately apparent or easy to attain. It may be necessary to consider some aspects as tentatively true until greater clarity can be developed through study. What is important is the exploration of ideas with our eyes wide open. If conviction cannot be generated immediately, at least we can be aware of uncertainty and work to revise our understanding over time.

If we apply these principles to our discussion of Shambhala, we can start to distinguish the ways different sources were used to shape Western myths at the end of the nineteenth century. As we saw in the previous chapter, the majority of views that arose were a mixture of the different legends originating from central Asia and the theories and interpretations of different charismatic individuals. These ideas

began to work their way into popular culture and were actively used to support various philosophical and political positions.

When compared to the original source material, many of these Western views could be seen to only loosely resemble the traditional information about Shambhala. When we look at these modern versions, we can see how they each evolved over time to illustrate the specific views and motivations of the people who propagated them. This process introduced many new ideas that transformed or distorted the original intent of the teachings.

This is not to say that anything other than the Kalachakra understanding of Shambhala is wrong, simply that there is uncertainty. We cannot judge the authenticity of the teachings received from spiritual beings or the visionary experiences that they are said to have had. What we can say is that many of the ideas they presented are not explicitly found in the Kalachakra teachings. So, the question then becomes: "Which teachings are more reliable?"

To answer this, we can look at the strength of a tradition over time. The Kalachakra teachings have existed in this world since around the tenth century CE, having first arisen within the context of an extremely well-developed Buddhist tradition that had existed since around the sixth century BCE. For more than a millennium, these teachings have guided hundreds of thousands of people to attain profound depths of realization and in turn enabled them to manifest excellent peace and harmony in their lives. The mere fact that the lineage has survived to this day is a testament to its efficacy and capacity.

Now compare this with the various New Age traditions that have developed over the course of the last hundred or so years. Many of them have been closely tied to persuasive individuals who have molded the stories to align with their personal beliefs. This has led to a diversity of views lacking any clear and defined path with little indication as to what is effective and what is not. While I cannot argue against the short-term benefit that many people may have received from these traditions, it is unclear what the long-term effects will be.

In this way, while we may like the sound of a particular New Age teaching, for my mind, the uncertainty regarding its potential result is simply too high. From a Buddhist perspective, this human life is too precious to waste on a long shot that may or may not bring lasting benefit. Instead, it seems more prudent to focus our energy on familiarizing ourselves with rigorously tested wisdom that we can be confident will take us in the right direction.

The essence of the first of the four reliances is a warning against relying too heavily on reputation and popularity as a measure for authenticity. Instead, it recommends that we look closely at the source material and what is actually being said. If we do this, we can develop greater confidence in the views that we hold and, therefore, move beyond a superficial and incomplete level of understanding.

Reliance on the Meaning

The text continues:

> Rely on the meaning, not the words.

Based on our previous discussion, we can identify the Kalachakra teachings as our primary source of information regarding Shambhala. But how do we understand what is presented in these texts? Which interpretation should we rely on?

On first examination of the source materials, we will notice they are written in the ancient language of Sanskrit. While there are many scholars of the Sanskrit language, there is no longer an unbroken spiritual lineage of studying and practicing Kalachakra in Sanskrit. This means that in order to really explore the meaning of the Kalachakra within the context of a living spiritual tradition, we must rely on translations. And that means we must rely on the choices made by the translators. Even in a language such as classical Tibetan that has a similar structure to Sanskrit, subtle changes in word selection can drastically alter the meaning conveyed by the text. We

can only imagine the enormous challenges that will exist for translation into languages such as English.

In addition to the variations that arise based on the translation process itself, we must also consider the inherent complexity of the actual texts. The *Kalachakra Tantra* contains a very ancient presentation of extremely profound ideas embedded within an esoteric language that defies modern materialistic notions of reality. This means that to fully comprehend these concepts, we must depend on the commentaries of different lineage masters who each have a unique and personal experience of the text's meaning. Our understanding can be drastically different depending on which commentaries we rely on.

With multiple translations and commentaries available, there are many different interpretations for understanding the meaning of the Kalachakra texts. As a result, there is an increased possibility for people to fixate on a given interpretation, claiming it to be the definitive presentation of the meaning. By disregarding the nature of how the interpretation was produced, they lock themselves into a single conceptual box that only serves to limit their understanding.

A good example of how this can occur is with basic mathematics. Take, for instance, the simple statement that 1+1=2. The moment we accept this as true, then a statement such as 1+1=3 is considered false. Things quickly become binary in nature: black or white, right or wrong. Now consider what happens when we recognize that math is a symbolic language used to represent a conventional truth. The statement of 1+1=2 illustrates the concept of addition, in which two things are grouped together to form a composite. In our statement, 1 is a symbol, as are +, =, and 2. When we recognize that language is a conceptual construct, there is no problem in changing the symbol 2 for the symbol 3 as long as we understand what those symbols are referring to. What is important, then, is to remember the meaning attributed to each of the symbols and not fixate too heavily on any single form of presentation.

Three ways in which the *Kalachakra Tantra* challenges the reader to avoid this sort of fixation are: the purposeful appropriation of

terms from Vedic philosophy; the use of a symbolic numbering system (for example, “moon” means “1”); and the intentional breaking of grammatical structures in the commentary. These methods are skillful means to counteract the tendency to heavily grasp on to words as meaning only one thing. This is important because in order to penetrate into the deeper meaning of the text, one must develop a flexibility of mind that can easily shift from one level of interpretation to another. Only then is it possible to reconcile the apparent contradictions that arise from an overly literal interpretation.

In relation to our understanding of Shambhala, we can see this type of fixation arising within the various conceptual views referred to in the previous chapter. Generally speaking, the interpretation of some academic scholars relied on the notion that time is fixed and events occur in a linear fashion. This view of reality accords with classical physics and, therefore, promotes the idea that the descriptions regarding Shambhala must have some definite relationship to events that have already been established as true. The source material therefore seems to have been interpreted to make it fit as closely as possible into a preexisting history of accepted academic scholarship.

While those who are more spiritually oriented may change their worldview, the problem of holding too tightly to a single interpretation remains. For many scholars, the study of Kalachakra—and hence the understanding of Shambhala—is generally based on projecting philosophical notions onto the Kalachakra in accordance with other systems of thought. For instance, some scholars choose to interpret the texts based on the understanding of emptiness as described in the second turning of the Buddhist sutras in which ultimate reality is posited as a nonaffirming negation, or mere absence. While this is not wrong from one perspective, it is limited, as it will only result in unveiling partial aspects of the tantra’s ultimate meaning.

The second reliance draws our awareness to the fact that we cannot rely solely on literal interpretations. These can be helpful to

get a general sense for what is being said, but ultimately we must reflect on the deeper meaning to unveil the essential message. Through cultivating greater flexibility of mind, we can actively shift our perspective across multiple interpretations and thereby gain a more complete picture of what is actually being communicated. For instance, in Buddhism, we could study the different schools of thought in order to understand how people interpret the same topics. In this way, our understanding would become multidimensional in nature, allowing us to grow familiar with different aspects of truth that are not initially obvious from a single vantage point.

Reliance on the Definitive Meaning

The text then says:

> Rely on the definitive meaning, not the provisional meaning.

By working with multiple perspectives for interpreting the teachings, we begin to develop a more well-rounded conceptual understanding of what Shambhala is and how it relates to the notions of peace and harmony. Instead of revealing only a partial image, we can begin to work with a more complete picture of how everything fits together. Still, this picture only represents one layer of understanding and, therefore, is limited in nature.

As we peel back this outer shell, we encounter another layer of understanding just below the surface. If we continue this process, we begin to slowly, slowly uncover ever-increasing levels of subtlety. With each new layer, the perspective shifts and the story it tells about reality also changes. In this way, our conceptual understanding eventually becomes so refined that the story we tell ourselves comes to mirror the very essence of reality as it is.

Within this context, we can speak of two types of meaning: definitive and provisional. The final level of wisdom that relates directly to the nature of reality is known as the definitive meaning.

The layers of interpretation built on top of that core wisdom are known as the provisional meanings. They are provisional in the sense of being temporary views we hold in order to later reveal a more profound layer of truth. Once that truth is revealed, we can say the provisional meaning has served its purpose and is no longer needed.

For an example of this relationship, consider how a doctor may treat different patients. The doctor must first diagnose the cause of the sickness and then give different treatments to different patients based on that analysis. For some, the sickness is straightforward, and one level of treatment is enough to bring them back into balance. For others, however, the situation is more complex, and layers of sickness must be cleared away in a progressive fashion. In these cases, the doctor will initially give one course of treatment and then change the treatment to adapt to the needs of the patient.

Like a skilled physician, the Buddha recognized that awareness of context is extremely important when communicating any form of profound wisdom. For this reason, he would tailor his teachings to meet the specific needs of a given student. Consequently, two students experiencing similar problems might receive two completely different pieces of advice. To some, this may seem contradictory, but it makes perfect sense when you recognize that the Buddha was able to go beyond the superficial layer of external conditions and also take into account the subtler layer of internal conditions.

The limitation here occurs when people confuse a provisional meaning with the definitive meaning. Grasping on to the provisional meaning as the final truth prevents them from refining their view any further and essentially puts the brakes on their spiritual development. They falsely assume that they have reached the end of the road and so fail to keep moving forward.

Provisional meanings are just that: provisional. They are stepping-stones that lead us closer to the definitive truth one layer of understanding at a time. This is why all of the authentic wisdom traditions are so effective. They each work with specific provisional meanings that allow practitioners of different capacities to clear

away layers of confusion. Eventually, all of these systems will need to be abandoned. The layer of truth we work with will cease to be a Christian truth, a Muslim truth, or a Buddhist truth—it will simply be truth. Failure to release these temporary categories will only serve as an obstacle to realization of the definitive meaning.

It is here we can evaluate which views of Shambhala incorporate not only the provisional meanings of peace and harmony but also the definitive meaning. If we look at views such as that of Chögyam Trungpa's Shambhala Training, we can see that its main focus is the creation of an enlightened society. Trungpa Rinpoche used his own profound spiritual insight to shape a system of training inspired by the ideas of Shambhala that could benefit people who were not necessarily ready to follow an intensive yogic path. For those who undertake Shambhala Training in this way, such a system has at best the capacity to produce a Shambhala-like experience, where the world is populated by truly exceptional human beings. We can all agree that this is undoubtedly a noble and worthwhile goal. However, if we wish to ultimately transcend the relative realm of existence, we will need to go deeper than this.

When we look to the Kalachakra system's actual teachings, we find that they present a detailed pathway for cultivating not only the preliminary experiences of Shambhala in this human realm but also the advanced practices that allow one to fully unveil the ultimate nature of Shambhala in this or future lives. It is this vast and profound focus on the definitive meaning that makes Kalachakra so unique and ultimately so powerful. Within one cohesive system, the path itself supports the progressive abandonment of provisional truths in a natural way that allows for the experience of the definitive truth to arise.

This third reliance essentially urges us not to be complacent. The Buddha tells us to always dig deeper until we have removed every obscuration and perfected every quality. Only then will we achieve a state where there is nothing left to be done. We should never give up or be satisfied with where we are right now. Instead, we need to be

diligent in our search for the most complete and all-encompassing wisdom we could potentially experience.

Reliance on Primordial Wisdom

Finally, the last line of the text reads:

> Rely on primordial wisdom, not consciousness.

The term *consciousness* in this context refers to the dualistic mind that operates on the basis of a subject and an object. The subject is a person, a self, a reference point. The object is whatever appears to that subject and can consist of shapes and forms, sounds, smells, flavors, tactile sensations, and numerous other mental activities. These are the elements that make up our regular day-to-day experience of the world. Objects appear within the mind and are experienced by the subject as a momentary relationship formed by an endless array of conceptual constructs.

When the definitive meaning appears to a consciousness, it does so indirectly through a concept and so is one step removed from the actual definitive meaning—the nature of reality itself. Even though consciousness can be very subtle, there is still a separation between subject and object. It is this final grasping on to the dualistic perspective that blocks a person from experiencing reality free from limitation. Therefore, in order to experience ultimate peace and harmony, one must be able to transcend consciousness itself.

To do this, it is necessary to completely stop the flow of gross, subtle, and very subtle conceptual constructs. The subject is sustained by a perpetual grasping on to existence. When this very subtle concept of "I am" is dissolved, the dualistic mind unravels, and the pristine qualities of the ultimate nature are able to manifest in a nondualistic way. This level of experience is called "nonconceptual primordial wisdom."

When we think about primordial wisdom from the perspective of consciousness, we can refer to it as buddha nature. This term

indicates that our ultimate nature is free from all conceptual limitations. It is our intrinsic nature to be an enlightened being, a buddha, but due to our grasping, this nature is unable to manifest fully in our experience. So, while we may not currently be buddhas, it can be said that we all possess buddha nature.

Through this last line of the text, the Buddha is indicating that we must move beyond our conceptual understanding. The comprehension of the definitive meaning through concepts will always be indirect and thus limited. We should therefore strive to actualize a direct experience of the definitive meaning. If we can abide continually within that experience, we can eliminate all causes that prevent peace and harmony from arising.

To help us understand the difference between direct and indirect experience, we can think of an artist who is sculpting a piece of clay. The artist is able to visualize within her mind the shape of the sculpture she would like to create. Her vision may be specific and detailed, or it may be only a rough idea, but, nonetheless, through this mental image, the artist is able to "know" the sculpture indirectly. The image acts like a placeholder that represents the reality she is hoping to manifest. Beginning with a formless block of clay, the artist shapes and molds the medium to match her mental image, and slowly the appearance of the sculpture begins to manifest. As she works, she can feel its contours materialize through her hands and the experience becomes immediate and vivid. Eventually, she is able to abandon the mental image completely, as the sculpture is now more detailed and complete than any vision her imagination could generate. Finally, her masterpiece is fully manifest, and others are also able to experience it for themselves.

Similarly, we can familiarize ourselves with the peace and harmony of Shambhala by discussing its qualities, developing models to assist our understanding of its nature, or even planning different strategies to bring it into being. And yet, no matter how thorough and detailed our concepts become, they will never fully manifest until we work with our minds. Only through experience can we taste the genuine peace and harmony that is our ultimate nature. By

training to overcome the afflicted states that limit our mind's capacity, our experience of Shambhala will begin to manifest. In the end, when the last of our obscurations is cleared away—when all we need to do is done—the full radiance of Shambhala will shine like a blazing sun.

The resultant path of Buddhist tantra is an incredibly efficient and powerful method for dissolving the dualistic mind. It is designed to work directly with our own experience in order to create the optimal conditions for experiencing our true nature. Like any path, however, there is a process. During the early stages of this process, concepts are used very skillfully in order to establish a clear conceptual view of how reality exists. Through an intensive process of purification, gross concepts are cleared away and a subtle conceptual mind is manifested. From this level of consciousness, it is considerably easier to recognize primordial wisdom and to develop familiarity with it. This initial phase is known as the generation stage.

For those who choose to practice the Kalachakra path, there is an extensive selection of generation-stage practices, each designed to help purify different obscurations for a diversity of practitioners. These practices are still conceptual in nature; therefore, they must ultimately be transcended. It is for this reason that focusing solely on the generation stage is insufficient to achieve the ultimate manifestation of Shambhala. For this to occur, one needs to sever the conceptual mind and abide in nonconceptual primordial wisdom.

The way Kalachakra does this is through a sequence of advanced yogic techniques that are collectively known as the completion stage. The practices and pith instructions to achieve the Kalachakra completion stage are exceedingly rare in this world. They primarily survive in their complete form within the Jonang tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. While other Tibetan Buddhist schools also teach the Kalachakra system and have learned Kalachakra masters, the Jonang are the only ones to specialize in the practice of Kalachakra and maintain an unbroken lineage tracing back to Shambhala itself. Thus, those wishing to seriously engage with Kalachakra will

eventually need to rely on the Jonang system of practice in order to achieve the final result of this path.

How Karma Establishes Realization

Through the teaching of the four reliances, we can see a progressive unveiling of truth that occurs as you learn to overcome the limitations of grasping. As we have seen, the nature of this process consists of many levels of realization, and therefore any approach that works with Shambhala must also take these levels into account.

The main advantage to such an approach is that it allows individuals to work with a concept of Shambhala that accords with their own personal level of spiritual development. This means that while working at a preliminary level, the causes to experience a much deeper and more expansive level are already being created.

To understand how this can be, we need to speak about the nature of karma. Since this is a very broad topic that I cover extensively in my book *Unveiling Your Sacred Truth,* we will not go into great detail here. For now, the main thing to remember is that every action we perform leaves karmic propensities in our mindstream. These propensities condition not only the appearances that arise in the mind but also how we experience them. We can think of our personal collection of propensities as the lens through which we see the world. If we change the lens, we change the experience. This basic principle means that we each have the capacity to shape the types of experience we will have in the future. Through developing a greater awareness of the karmic relationship between our actions and their corresponding results, we can, to some degree, control what karma ripens and how.

With regard to our current situation, we can easily see that most of our experiences are conditioned by our present form. This human shape we have right now means we experience everything through the eyes of a human. Can you imagine how different our experience would be if we had the body of an insect? Where we are born and the

form we take are dependent on the karmic propensities activated at the time of our death, and it is thus our karma that projects one set of conditions over another.

Within this context, understanding the many levels of Shambhala not only allows us to experience peace and harmony in accord with our present conditions but also to lay down the necessary karmic propensities to project the conditions we need in order to experience a deeper form of Shambhala in the future. You can think of it like a guaranteed investment where every deposit made is never lost and keeps growing in value. The only limits to the benefit we will receive from such an investment are the limits we place on ourselves.

Based on this view, we can develop a long-term perspective that incorporates a much more expansive and profound understanding of causes and conditions. Rather than merely thinking within the scope of a single lifetime, we can incorporate every moment of our potential experience to include the process of death, the transitionary period after death, and any subsequent rebirths that follow. With such a broad scope, we are able to identify a range of opportunities that we can all use in order to manifest Shambhala within our experience.

3

Realms of Opportunity

Until we have completely severed all bias and ignorance, we will continue to be subject to the karmic law of cause and effect. Put simply, this natural law states that every action a sentient being engages in will condition the nature of their future experience. Since we cannot escape this basic truth, it stands to reason that developing a deeper understanding of its influence on us will help us use it to our advantage.

The key point to understand is that our future is based on what we do in the present. In order to experience a desired result, we need to focus on generating the causes for that experience. We do this through the manipulation of two types of phenomena: karmic propensities and karmic connections.

Karmic Propensities

As mentioned earlier, a karmic propensity refers to the habitual tendencies built up within our mindstream. Every moment of every second, our consciousness is experiencing a steady flow of appearances arising in the mind. Through the dualistic view of subject and object, it reacts to those appearances in different ways by experiencing them as pleasurable, painful, or neutral. This reaction is

the result of a habitual tendency for how we, the subject, relate to an appearance, the object.

When we engage in any action, we are essentially training the mind to perceive an object in a particular way. We can see this process occurring when a child learns to speak. At first, the child is only able to perceive vague colors and shapes and so everything is indistinct and unified. As she starts to distinguish one shape as being separate from another, her mother introduces her to a sequence of sounds. Every time the child sees the shape, her mother makes the corresponding sounds, and slowly the baby learns to relate the sounds to the shapes. If she becomes habituated to this connection, she will be able to conjure up a mental image of the shape simply by hearing the sounds and vice versa.

What we call “learning” is actually the strengthening of karmic propensities in relation to a given phenomenon. We essentially train ourselves to have specific responses to the world that appears to us. In the beginning, this process requires very definite intentions in order to consciously build up a network of propensities. Over time, the habit becomes second nature, requiring very little intention to activate it.

Here, our goal is to strengthen karmic propensities that are conducive to experiencing a deeper, more expansive form of peace and harmony. At the same time, we are looking to weaken the propensities that contribute to bias and ignorance. We can do this through the accumulation of two things: merit and wisdom. Merit is the habituation to virtuous activity, where virtue is a karmic propensity that is conducive to peace and harmony. In a way, merit is like a self-perpetuating generator; the more habituated we are to virtue, the more virtuous actions we engage in. This leads to stronger habituation, which leads to more virtuous action and so forth. Wisdom, at this level, is a particular type of knowing that allows us to relate with reality in an undistorted way. It is a direct antidote to ignorance; the more wisdom we develop, the less we are dominated by ignorance. The less ignorance we have, the less our true nature is

masked and, therefore, the more we are able to experience peace and harmony.

On this basis, when we speak of the "accumulation of merit and wisdom," we are referring to the purposeful shaping of our individual collection of karmic propensities. Think of them as two networks of qualities that create the conditions for achieving realizations of Shambhala.

Within the Kalachakra path, these networks are developed through the practice of an ethical system of conduct. These ethics provide the foundation for a variety of skillful means that allow us to experience increasingly subtler layers of reality. This system of conduct is split into three levels: nonviolence, *rime* philosophy, and pure perception. The essence of nonviolent conduct is to align one's actions with the spirit of loving-kindness and compassion. Within this first level, we recognize the interconnected nature of all beings and their shared aspiration for genuine happiness. This leads to an engagement with activities that are designed to minimize the harm we inflict on those around us. By doing this, we create the most basic conditions for peace and harmony to arise.

As for the second, the Tibetan word *rime* means "without bias." It refers to a level of conduct that counteracts the biased mind that relates to the world in a self-centered way. By recognizing the limitations this bias creates in our experience, we slowly work to dissolve our self-cherishing and shift our attitude toward a mind that cherishes others. As different layers of bias are removed, our experience of peace and harmony becomes broader and more inclusive.

The final level of conduct, pure perception, is focused on cultivating our relationship with the ultimate nature of reality. The less bias we have, the more we are able to experience this reality and, therefore, the more wisdom we generate. Through this gradual process of purification, we begin to recognize how all of our experiences are rooted in this nature and, therefore, everything becomes an opportunity for experiencing a deeper and more profound realization of Shambhala.

In the beginning, our main focus is developing a strong collection of merit. This acts as a type of battery to energize our spiritual practice and create the conditions necessary for developing insight into the nature of reality. Over time, once a base of merit has been established, the emphasis shifts to the accumulation of wisdom. When both of these accumulations have been perfected, we have arrived at the end of the path and no more needs to be done.

Karmic Connections

While an individual's karmic propensities are the direct cause for experiencing Shambhala, these propensities rely on the use of a spiritual path to effectively shape them into that result. A spiritual path is a collection of ideas and methods that can be used to focus our actions. Simply developing an intellectual understanding of such a path is not particularly useful. For it to be effective, those ideas and methods must be put into practice. Only then will they become a support for the creation of the specific propensities that are needed.

Unfortunately, practice is rarely straightforward. In fact, it can be quite difficult to create the merit required. This is because we are not born into this life with a clean slate. Instead, we are born with a massive network of existing karmic propensities that are not necessarily in tune with our aspirations for greater peace and harmony. For most of us, they are the exact opposite of what we need.

These existing karmic networks are currently much stronger than our networks of merit and wisdom. This means that our attempts to practice virtue automatically go against the flow of our habitual tendencies. As anyone who has tried to kick a persistent habit will tell you, this process is not easy. For this reason, to turn the tide of our karmic battle, we will definitely need help.

However, not everyone is the same. We all have unique collections of karmic propensities that have been built up by the many unique conditions we have encountered during beginningless past lives.

Statistically speaking, when considering the infinite variations of beings, some people will naturally have stronger collections of virtue than others. We can refer to such people as being more spiritually developed. The more developed the being, the easier it is for them to engage in spiritual practice.

In order to work with these beings to overcome our own habitual tendencies, we must understand what are known as karmic connections. A karmic connection is formed when two beings create similar karmic propensities at the same time or in similar situations. The strength of this connection will depend on how similar the actions are and on a variety of other factors such as motivation, awareness, and focus. The propensities that are created by this sort of shared experience are commonly referred to as "collective karma."

Collective karma is not something that exists somewhere out there separate from our own mind. It isn't like a shared bank account that everyone can access. Rather, collective karma is more like a synchronization between two stopwatches. If we start both watches at exactly the same time, they both will display the same numbers on their screens. While the watches remain separate, they are both manifesting in similar ways.

Likewise, when two people perform a similar action with similar motivation, they are both laying down a similar type of karmic propensity that will lead to similar results. For instance, imagine two friends going to a restaurant together. One of them mentions how good the seafood pasta is and chooses to order it. The other friend likes how the dish sounds and so decides to try it as well. Both eat the food, and both enjoy the experience. In this example, both people have strengthened a karmic propensity for liking the seafood pasta at this particular restaurant. In the future, both are more likely to react positively to the idea of eating it again.

One thing that is very important to note here is the way one friend influenced the other. The first person already had some experience with the pasta, meaning he already had a propensity for liking it. The second person had never eaten it before, but, through an interaction with the friend, developed the intention to try it. The end result is

that through the influence of the first person, the second engaged in an action that strengthened a specific propensity.

Culinary preferences aside, the same principle can be applied to our quest for greater peace and harmony. By paying attention to the types of connections we are generating with the different people in our lives, we can begin to strengthen propensities that would normally be too difficult for us to develop on our own. Here, the goal is to surround ourselves with people who can exert a positive influence on our activities and inspire us toward virtue. Within the context of the Kalachakra path, this is done in three ways. First, one can attend a Kalachakra empowerment ceremony. As briefly mentioned earlier, unlike other systems of tantra, the Kalachakra empowerments are given in the form of a blessing ceremony to as many people as possible. When taken in this way, the event is an excellent opportunity for a diverse range of people to come together and celebrate the principles of peace and harmony through a massive shared experience. Not only does this create a strong connection with the spiritual master who bestows the blessing, but it also creates strong connections among all who attend. Each time we are present at such a ceremony, we are laying down significant karmic propensities that orient our mind toward peace and harmony. These propensities can then act as the conditions for us to eventually engage in a spiritual practice to cultivate these qualities more effectively.

Second, one can connect with past Kalachakra lineage masters. Another method for strengthening one's karmic connection to a spiritual path is through developing a greater awareness of those who have already achieved the results we aspire to ourselves. Specifically, this can be done by studying the life stories of the great Kalachakra masters who have completed the path before us. Through learning the ways in which they overcame their limitations, we can inspire our own minds with the possibility of doing the same. It is for this reason that you will find a detailed history of the Kalachakra lineage at the end of this book.

Third, one can connect with a spiritual teacher. Of all the possibilities, the most effective and direct way to create a strong connection for engaging in the practice of a spiritual path is to seek teachings from a qualified teacher of that path. By connecting with a living and breathing master of the tradition, we can create very powerful conditions for practice. An authentic teacher will not only inspire us to overcome our limitations but also provide us with the methods needed to do so.

Together, karmic propensities and karmic connections provide an extremely skillful method for working with karma in a very proactive way. As we will see below, they are also the basis upon which highly realized beings are able to support our practice through the creation of specific conducive conditions. By connecting our minds with the aspirations of those beings, we can maximize our potential and progress along the path more effectively.

Realms of Experience

To understand how this is possible, we will now discuss the nature of experience through the lens of karma. As we have seen, karmic propensities are responsible for shaping the moment-to-moment experience that arises within our mindstreams. Karmic connections serve to strengthen the influence other sentient beings have on our minds: the stronger the connection, the stronger the impact. To illustrate, we can take the example of painting a picture. The propensities are like the different colors of paint, while the connections are like someone suggesting where to place those colors. The question then becomes: “What image will you paint?” The mind is like a blank canvas; there is no limit to the number of appearances that can arise within it. The limitations do not come from the canvas but from your palette of colors—your karmic propensities. Imagine how limited the images you create would be if you only had two colors to work with. Then compare this with the images you could create if you had access to the full spectrum of colors.

Unlike a painting, our minds are not fixed. It is like the image is wiped clean and a new one is created every moment. While the next image will often be very similar to the previous one, it is never exactly the same. It is constantly changing in subtle ways leading to an endless stream of karmic appearances. Looking back over our lives, it is easy to identify the wide range of experiences we have encountered. Similarly, it isn't too difficult to imagine the many experiences we could have in the future. If we analyze our experiences, we can see that certain patterns arise in relation to specific situations. For instance, consider the appearances that arose at different stages of your life. Think of the places that appeared to you in childhood and the places that appear to you now. Think of the people you have met and the emotions or thoughts you have had. If we compare all these experiences, we can begin to get a sense of how powerful and creative our karma can be.

Now consider the experiences of those around you. Are there people in your life who have encountered similar situations to you? Think of all the people who live on your street, in the surrounding area, or in your specific region. Think of your country, your hemisphere, your world. While the images our karmic collections are painting are unique, there are still many aspects that are common across various groups. It is like everyone in a particular place is using a similar palette of colors.

When we recognize these similarities through our experience, we can identify several different categories. These are simply labels we use to distinguish one type of experience from another. When we generalize experience in this way, we speak of "realms of experience." The word *realm* here does not refer to a physical kingdom with clearly marked boundaries and features; it refers to the general pattern of how reality is perceived from the perspective of an individual mindstream. The basic principle is that people who have similar karma will experience reality in a similar way, and they can therefore be said to occupy the same realm of experience.

An important point to keep in mind as we discuss the existence of realms is that they are entirely mental in nature. The mind is a

nonphysical phenomenon and, therefore, the existence of one realm does not limit or prevent the existence of any other realm. For example, let's say that there are two people sleeping together in a bed and both are dreaming. The first person dreams of running through a vast open field under a rainbow-colored sky. The second is in a nightmare, trapped underwater in a metal cage. For each person, the vivid dream world they are experiencing is their reality at that moment, and yet neither reality prevents nor limits the other.

Likewise, one section of physical space could contain an infinite number of different minds, each experiencing that space in a different way. Consider three people looking at an image of a wrathful deity. For the first person, the image may appear terrifying and threatening, giving rise to an experience of intense aversion. For the second, the image is strong and powerful, creating an experience of confidence and determination. The third person may see an expression of profound truth, and on that basis may develop an unshakable feeling of devotion. This is one situation, but three realms of experience.

Within this context, the type of experience that arises will depend on the types of karma present in the mindstream of the individual. In general, we can speak of three major realms of experience: the formless realm, the form realm, and the desire realm.

The formless realm is produced by the fixed karma created from very subtle and powerful levels of meditative absorption. Since such karma is based on single-pointedness, it is called "fixed" in the sense of abiding without movement until the potency of the karma is exhausted. Such a mind experiences the space-like qualities of the foundational consciousness upon which the dualistic mind is based. Beings who experience reality in this way are oblivious to all other forms of beings, becoming completely absorbed in their own vast existence for unimaginably long periods of time.

Like the formless realm, the form realm is produced by the fixed karma of meditative absorption. The main difference is that beings in this realm undergo a wider range of subjective experience. Specifically, they are focused on different degrees of the foundational

qualities of bliss, nonconceptuality, and vividness. Beings in this realm are purely mental in nature and, therefore, do not experience an objective gross reality out there. Instead, they experience reality through subtle conceptual constructs.

The desire realm is the result of a mixture of variable karmic propensities that produce a variety of derivative realms of experience. The main characteristic of beings here is that they are dominated by the subject-object relationship of the dualistic mind. Each moment of their experience is shaped by the types of objects they perceive and their subjective reactions to those objects. Beings in this realm have the experience of a physical body that occupies an external world that is perceived as separate from themselves.

Of the three, the formless realm is so subtle that it is of little use to those interested in spiritual practice. While the form realm may be ideal for the spiritually inclined, it is only useful for those who have developed considerable familiarity with a spiritual path prior to taking birth there. Without sufficient virtuous conditioning, a form realm being will simply rest in a dreamlike state free from manifest suffering. For this reason, the desire realm is considered the most appropriate for the actualization of a spiritual aim such as the manifestation of Shambhala.

Looking closer at the desire realm, we can see that there is a limitless combination of potential subject-object relationships that could be created. In fact, the karmic networks used to project this realm of experience are so vast and complex that only the omniscient mind of an enlightened being could possibly fathom their complexity. Fortunately, we don’t need to possess this level of understanding in order to make use of the principles that shape them.

Two basic types of experience can be identified within this realm: those dominated by constant suffering and those in which suffering is periodic. The former is the case in the lower realms, and the latter in the higher realms. In order to create the causes for greater peace and harmony, we need to practice a spiritual path. We cannot do this if we are completely overwhelmed by suffering and torment.

Therefore, of the two, the higher realms are more conducive to practice.

What the higher realms offer is a momentary break from suffering where a being can experience some degree of pleasure or happiness. It is this combination of suffering and happiness that distinguishes the usefulness of a given realm for the purpose of spiritual practice. However, in some of the higher realms, beings experience significantly more happiness than suffering and so are not motivated to make changes in their lives. Others are so consumed by their desires that they never stop to analyze the nature of their experience. For spiritual practice to occur, there must be just enough suffering to motivate people to change their habitual propensities while also having enough happiness or leisure to provide the conditions needed to make those changes. Such a realm is called a "human realm."

The term *human* here does not refer to a particular body shape. Instead, it refers to a particular type of experience. A human being experiences a world filled with different degrees of suffering and happiness. While at times these seem to be quite extreme, when compared to the suffering or happiness of other realms, human experiences are quite mild in nature. This means that humans have tremendous potential to observe their experiences of suffering and happiness and to develop insight into the corresponding causes. This sort of discriminating intelligence is almost nonexistent in other realms of experience and is the basis upon which all forms of spiritual practice are established.

Bodhisattva Realms of Opportunity

Being born into a human realm is determined by the karmic propensities we have accumulated within our mindstream. Unfortunately, merely taking birth as a human does not necessarily mean we will have the opportunity to engage in spiritual practice. This planet alone has more than 7.8 billion people manifesting a human realm of experience. Of those people, how many do you think

believe in the value of cultivating spiritual attributes? Of those, how many engage in practices that are capable of producing those qualities? And of those, how many dedicate their lives to such practice? While we all have the same potential, very few of us have the conditions needed to manifest that potential.

To overcome these odds, we definitely need help. This is where our karmic connections play a crucial role. As we have already established, some sentient beings are more spiritually developed than others. One example of such a being is what we call a "bodhisattva." Bodhisattvas are highly realized beings whose sole purpose in life is to bring benefit to others. Their minds are completely focused on helping others realize their potential and thereby experience lasting forms of genuine happiness. Such beings have vast compassion and wisdom that they channel into creating the conditions to facilitate spiritual growth.

Like a skillful parent, a great bodhisattva is able to recognize the karmic conditions that influence a sentient being's experience. With wisdom, they see the potential in a given situation, and then, with compassion, they develop the aspiration to manifest whatever is needed. Due to the power of their aspirations, bodhisattvas are able to exert enormous influence on those around them.

To illustrate, we can think of the way a spiritual teacher guides a student. Let's say a student is having a particular problem understanding an important concept. Due to his confusion, he has developed a number of wrong views regarding the nature of reality and these views are leading him to generate a stream of unvirtuous karmic propensities. The teacher recognizes that these propensities will result in the student experiencing suffering and, out of great compassion, decides to create a text to help that student. Through the power of his aspiration, the teacher successfully writes the text and makes it available to his student. This text provides an opportunity for the student to correct his view and thereby avoid generating more causes for suffering.

If we analyze the karma of this situation, we can see that the teacher uses his own karmic propensities to both examine the

situation and form the aspiration to help the student. No matter how strong that aspiration may be, if the teacher does not have a karmic connection with the student, he will be unable to actualize his aspiration. For any form of communication to occur, there must be some common ground of collective karma between the two beings. On the basis of this connection, the teacher is able to manifest an appearance that the student can then experience. Finally, the student must rely on his own karmic propensities to determine whether or not he will be able to take advantage of that appearance. In the end, it is always up to the individual to generate the necessary intentions to change his own habitual tendencies. No matter how advanced a teacher may be, only the student has the power to change his own mind.

A realm of opportunity is a window in space and time where conditions are present to produce a specific desired result. Bodhisattvas create these realms through actively shaping their own environment for the benefit of those who have karmic connections with them. At a gross level, examples of such activities include building temples, writing spiritual texts, and giving teachings. Each of these examples provides temporal conditions in which sentient beings can encounter the Dharma and benefit from its wisdom.

The limits of a bodhisattva's capacity to benefit sentient beings directly corresponds to the degree that she has perfected her own accumulation of merit and wisdom. As a bodhisattva refines her mind, she gains the capacity to operate on increasingly subtler levels of experience. This in turn allows her to develop expansive aspirations to communicate with other beings on more than just a gross level of experience.

Here, a gross level of experience is a particularly fixed and vivid level of experience produced by heavy grasping on to appearances arising in the mind. For example, think about water. It can be frozen into ice or melted into liquid. While ice is solid, water is malleable. We can view gross experience as being like ice. It is a mind that is frozen or fixed into a single configuration. It is the direct result of the specific karmic propensities that project a realm of experience. As

long as those propensities have power, sentient beings continue to experience reality in one dominant way.

This state, however, is only temporary. Every night, the appearances of waking reality dissolve into the dream state where one's physical reality is no longer capable of conditioning how reality is experienced. Like ice dissolving into water, dreams are a significantly subtler and more flexible level of experience, conditioned by a broader range of karmic propensities. Within such a realm, things that are not necessarily possible in one's waking experience become possible. Anyone who is proficient at lucid dreaming can tell you that gravity and other natural laws are entirely optional; even breathing, eating, and the constraints of space and time need not apply.

During the course of a single lifetime, we oscillate between the gross level of experience and the subtler levels. We continue in this way until the strength of our habitual tendencies runs out and this realm of experience dissolves completely. We call this process "death." At this time, the mind completely separates from the body and the connection to this world is severed. Without the constraints of a physical world, our minds abide in a dreamlike state until the conditions come together for another set of propensities to project a new realm of experience.

Highly realized bodhisattvas are aware of this process and are able to work with beings through these subtle realms of experience. Bodhisattvas of this level are able to manifest instantaneously whatever their minds can conceive, meaning they are able to efficiently shape conditions for sentient beings with the right karmic connections. Through the stability and power of their awareness, they can construct entire worlds, which can be experienced by those whose minds possess a similar degree of subtlety.

The closest analogy to this would be the concept of a shared dream. In such a situation, the bodhisattva is responsible for creating the general conditions of the world, while the sentient beings connected to that bodhisattva experience this world in relation to their own karmic propensities. This sort of experience is only

possible when there is a significant alignment of the karmic propensities between all of the individuals involved.

In these ways, bodhisattvas use whatever means are available to help sentient beings actualize their potential as effectively as possible. As sentient beings' minds become subtler, they become more receptive to the influence of these bodhisattvas. The combination of a bodhisattva's capacity and the receptivity of sentient beings means that at any given moment there are countless realms of opportunity being manifested. While some realms are based on very specific temporal conditions and last only a short period of time, others are more stable and can potentially last for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The only limits on how long a realm of opportunity will last depends on the strength of the mind or minds that created it.

As we move forward, we will bring our focus to the unique karmic relationship that Shambhala has with this world and the beings who populate it. Through the natural expression of the bodhisattvas' aspirations and our own karmic propensities, we will explore how our experience can potentially manifest the full spectrum of peace and harmony. If we are skillful enough in using the little time we have left in this life, each of these manifestations presents us with a different realm of opportunity that we can all take advantage of.

4

Manifestations of Shambhala

Keeping in mind the information we have discussed so far, take a moment to consider where you live. Here you are on the planet Earth—the third planet from the sun and the only planet (as far as we know) capable of sustaining life in this solar system. This system is just one tiny part of a much larger galaxy, which in turn is just one tiny part of a seemingly infinite universe. Instead of being born on one of the countless habitable planets in the universe, you were born here. Not just you, but billions of other people have also been born here.

Likewise, consider this particular period of time. You were not born a prehistoric Neanderthal nor a citizen of some ancient civilization. Instead, you were born into this time, with its own particular characteristics and challenges. Even though some of us belong to older generations and some to younger, we are all still experiencing a similar world right here and now.

None of this is random. It is a direct result of the karmic connections that we have each developed over countless lifetimes. These connections bind us together like glue so that no matter who we are or where we live, we all share these two basic similarities of place and time. If we bring greater awareness to these connections, we will see that we are living in a particularly special moment in which certain conditions are present. These conditions have created

a unique realm of opportunity that only those with our specific karma are fortunate enough to connect with.

First, the realm of Shambhala arose in this world. Due to the exceptional karmic propensities of love and compassion possessed by the beings of this world, the highly realized bodhisattvas with connections to our planet were able to manifest a sublime realm of opportunity that provides the ideal environment for humans to engage in spiritual practice. This realm exists to this day and manifests to those who create the causes to experience it.

Then, Shakyamuni Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma. Around the sixth century BCE, he demonstrated the attainment of enlightenment and gave teachings for more than fifty years to those who were fortunate enough to be his disciples. While we did not have the karma to be born at that time and place, the Buddha's teachings still exist and are currently practiced by approximately half a billion people.

Finally, the Buddha taught the *Kalachakra Tantra*. At the request of the first Dharma king of Shambhala, Suchandra, the Buddha turned the wheel of tantra, teaching the supreme king of tantra—*The Glorious Kalachakra*. This vast and profound teaching was upheld in the subtle realm of Shambhala for more than seventeen hundred years until it was finally introduced into the gross realm of India. Since then, it has been preserved in Tibet and is now finally being introduced to the rest of the world.

These three conditions do not exist in any other of the billionfold world systems in exactly this way, making it exceedingly fortunate for a being to possess the karma to be born in a time and place where they are accessible. Through the teachings of Kalachakra, we become aware of the existence of Shambhala. By establishing an awareness of Shambhala, we develop the aspiration to be born there, which in turn inspires us to practice the Kalachakra path. By practicing Kalachakra, we create the karmic propensities to manifest not only the provisional forms of Shambhala but also its definitive and ultimate nature.

Due to its extremely skillful manipulation of karma, Kalachakra provides a clear method that can be used by anyone on this planet to develop their mindstreams and experience the peace and harmony of Shambhala. Unlike other pure realms such as Buddha Amitabha's Sukhavati, experiencing Shambhala is not based solely on maintaining unwavering faith. It is based on actions that guarantee particular types of experiences. This certainty of results makes Kalachakra especially powerful for those beings who have the karmic connection to practice it.

How Shambhala Manifests

As we have discussed previously, the ultimate nature of reality is synonymous with the ultimate nature of Shambhala. These are simply two names that refer to the same dimension of reality. Since all phenomena arise in relation to this ultimate nature, we can say that all phenomena are inseparable from that nature. This means that from the perspective of an enlightened mind that abides in the state of Ultimate Shambhala, there is no difference between one phenomenon and the next.

For this reason, when we refer to how Shambhala manifests, we must always remember we are speaking of how it manifests to individual beings. It is only from their perspective that we can distinguish between different realms of experience. While some realms may be subtler or more gross than others, they are all still expressions of the same underlying nature. Thus, each of them provides a provisional path to knowing that deeper level of reality.

To help make sense of the different realms of experience related to Shambhala, we will use a twofold division based on the nature of the aspects emphasized within each: realms of provisional meaning and realms of definitive meaning. The first group represents the realms of opportunity that emphasize creating conditions for spiritual practice. These are karmic realms that act as temporary environments for helping a practitioner advance along the path. They

are provisional in the sense that once the practitioner reaches a certain point in their spiritual development, they can be let go, as they are no longer needed.

The second group, realms of definitive meaning, represents those realms that emphasize a specific opportunity to realize the ultimate nature of Shambhala. These realms are generally momentary in nature and, therefore, require significant training in order to make use of them. Each of these realms provides access to the subtlest state of mind, which can then be used to complete the accumulations of merit and wisdom for attaining full and complete enlightenment.

The Provisional Meaning of Shambhala

When considering the provisional meaning of Shambhala, we can make a distinction between how Shambhala manifests to a gross mind and how it manifests to a subtle mind. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the subtler a being's mind becomes, the more workable their experience can be. This flexibility of mind allows bodhisattvas to exert a more powerful form of influence and thus facilitate the manifestation of the perfect conditions for practice. At a gross level, however, our minds are simply too coarse and fixed to shape effectively, and so Shambhala can only manifest in a partial way. Instead of experiencing the full splendor of Shambhala, we are only able to experience some of its aspects.

Realms of Opportunity in the Aspect of Shambhala

For this reason, the first set of realms we will look at represent the level of Shambhala that any ordinary human being can experience. At its most basic level, this includes any experience that is rooted in loving-kindness and compassion. An example would be the peace and harmony two people share in a sincerely loving and supportive relationship. Due to the presence of love and compassion, peace and harmony can naturally arise. These qualities are the essential aspect of Shambhala.

At the next level, peace and harmony arise based on the practice of a spiritual path. Here, we are not speaking specifically about practicing Kalachakra. Any authentic spiritual path grounded in love and compassion has the capacity to nurture and cultivate the qualities of peace and harmony. These paths provide skillful methods for expanding love and compassion and thereby incorporating more people into our experience of peace and harmony. This expansion of scope is the vast aspect of Shambhala.

The more people who practice these authentic paths, the more influence the qualities of love and compassion can have. Slowly, the barriers between one group and the next begin to dissolve, and people are able to relate with one another on a much more fundamental level of experience. This recognition of our common nature is the unbiased aspect of Shambhala.

When all of these aspects are strengthened through the power of habituation, the values of the society shift. The focus moves from activities that bring suffering and conflict to those that create the causes for peace and harmony. This shift is a tipping point in the battle between ignorance and wisdom. Once a critical mass has been achieved, the door is opened for wisdom to grow stronger and stronger. If the society as a whole embraces that wisdom, it creates a momentum capable of manifesting a truly enlightened society in which everyone works together to support one another. This type of society is the unified aspect of Shambhala.

At this point, since we are still speaking in terms of a gross realm of experience, birth, aging, sickness, and death would continue to be experienced. In fact, there would still be many of the problems we are currently familiar with. The difference is that, with the power of wisdom, such a society could work with these problems in a way that brings benefit to everyone, not just a few. It would be a society in balance with its environment and its people—one free from war and man-made disasters. With harmony in the world, individuals would have the freedom to recognize their great potential and orient their lives toward genuine happiness. While such a society pales in comparison to the subtle levels of Shambhala, at this gross level, it

can in many ways be considered the perfection of peace and harmony in our world.

The Sublime Realm of Shambhala

Realms of opportunity arise on the basis of the aspirations of bodhisattvas and the karmic propensities of sentient beings. On a subtle level, a highly realized bodhisattva is limited only by the extent of their own creativity and is therefore capable of creating whatever conditions are needed to benefit the minds of sentient beings. The Sublime Realm of Shambhala is such a realm.

As we will see later, the kingdom of Shambhala has not always been as subtle as it is today. It began on a much grosser level, and over time, through the influence of the Kalachakra teachings, has evolved into its present form. The Shambhala that exists today is a direct result of the widespread influence of the *Kalachakra Tantra*. The connection between the two has been strengthened considerably over more than twenty-five hundred years, making the Kalachakra path the most efficient and direct way to experience this specific manifestation of Shambhala.

For some people, the Sublime Realm of Shambhala is little more than a nice story or myth. While such people may have some belief in the power of our potential, there is a great deal of doubt, which makes their faith unstable. This instability generally comes from a lack of understanding of how the mind and karma actually work. When you combine this lack of faith with a lack of clarity regarding what Shambhala is, the chances of experiencing this realm become very limited.

To overcome these obstacles, we need to develop the qualities of faith and clarity. While faith can be cultivated through conceptual understanding, such as in the aspirations to be born in a pure land or heaven, it is most effectively cultivated through experience. By engaging in Kalachakra practice, we begin to see the wisdom behind the meaning of the teachings. This leads to the development of greater faith in karma and this allows us to comprehend how a realm

like Shambhala is possible. As we familiarize ourselves with the descriptions, we can then develop greater clarity about its features. Such clarity connects our vision of Shambhala with the vision of the bodhisattvas, creating the conditions for our subtle mind to manifest this sublime realm of opportunity.

Returning to our painting analogy, we can imagine a painting class with multiple students sitting in front of their easels ready to begin. The teacher starts to outline a scene for the students to paint, beginning with a general description of the major elements, followed by details of specific features. The more details the students capture, the more their paintings resemble the teacher's vision. And yet, while they may all be similar in content, due to the students' differing styles and their individual interpretation of the instructions, each painting will be unique.

From this example, the teacher represents the bodhisattva kings of Shambhala. The scene the teacher describes is the history of Shambhala as found in the Kalachakra teachings. The students each paint a picture on the canvas from their minds in accordance with their own karmic interpretation of the story. In this way, if we have a sincere desire to experience Shambhala, the first thing we need to do is listen to its story.

The Environment of Shambhala

We start by trying to get a sense for the general layout of the environment. The entire realm is surrounded by an impenetrable barrier of mountains that are so high that they literally dwarf even the greatest mountains in our world. The surface of the outer slopes is rocky and barren, becoming colder and more inhospitable the higher one goes, until all life completely disappears, leaving only the freezing bite of blizzard, snow, and ice. Any attempt to physically approach even the lower sections is absolutely impossible.

Descending from the crystal-like peaks down the inner slopes, we pass through rocky outcrops into thick woodlands and lush jungles, finally arriving in the rolling hills of the valleys below. The cutting

chill of winter gives way to a warm spring day, neither too warm nor too cool. The air, fresh and clear, invigorates the body with each breath. There is no sun and no moon, nor are there any stars in the sky. Instead, the very landscape itself emits a warm glow that illuminates the world in accordance with the needs of the inhabitants. Light shimmers on the snow-covered peaks and reflects a dazzling display of rainbow light dancing across the sky, like the northern lights of the Arctic Circle.

Looking down upon the kingdom, eight great regions form an outer ring around a central one, like the spokes of a wheel and its hub. Each of these regions is divided by natural boundaries of winding rivers and towering mountains. Unlike those on the outer border, these mountains are filled with vibrant green valleys, offering ample opportunity to travel from one region to the next. While the landscape of each region varies considerably, all are a mixture of luscious grasslands and magnificent forests. The countless rivers winding their way through the land connect a huge network of lakes containing pristine, nectar-like water, which sparkles and reflects the natural splendor of the environment.

From the perspective of the humans who live there, the land is filled with many beautiful animals. These are mere emanations of the bodhisattvas that serve to ornament the land and resonate its attractive qualities. These animals are peaceful and live in natural harmony with their world with no need to kill each other. The melodious songs of birds echo through the valleys, providing comfort and inspiration to all who hear them.

The rolling hills are filled with expansive meadows of beautiful flowers, as well as various types of orchards and gardens. The land naturally gives rise to an endless supply of fresh fruit and vegetables with no need to cultivate or farm. Everything needed to sustain life is available in abundance, so no matter where one goes, food is always available.

Within each outer region, there are twelve kingdoms divided naturally by the lay of the land. The people are content with what they have and happily share their resources with one another. As a

result, there are no wars, and each kingdom lives in total harmony with its neighbors.

Each of the twelve kingdoms has ten million cities that sit in perfect balance with the surrounding countryside. The architecture rises effortlessly from the aspirations of the inhabitants in accordance with their karmic propensities and, as such, each city has evolved into a vibrant center of both culture and beauty.

In the central region of the land, an immense mountain rises high above all the surrounding valleys. It is known as Mount Kailasha. If you were to climb this mountain, you would pass through various levels of vegetation before finally arriving at a plateau where, in the center, the capital of all of Shambhala can be found—the magnificent city of Kalapa.

The city is surrounded by two lotus-filled lakes and a vast oasis of pleasure gardens. The floral arrays and spectacular landscaping make it unlike any other place in the entire realm. Beings come from all over Shambhala to abide in the supreme peace and solitude that emanate from this paradise.

Kalapa itself spirals upward toward the royal palace, and as you make your way through the streets, the buildings become more and more magnificent, adorned with an infinite display of jewels and ornaments. Finally, you arrive at the gates of the palace, home to the kings of Shambhala.

The walls of the palace are covered with astoundingly ornate murals that tell the inspirational stories of the omniscient Dharma kings and the evolution of Shambhala through the power of Kalachakra. At its center is a glorious throne room with life-sized statues of all thirty-five kings, including those who have ruled and those yet to come. Behind the throne, raised high above, is a massive statue of the twenty-four-armed manifestation of the Kalachakra deity embracing the consort Vishvamata. Large paintings of other deities of the enlightened mandala hang from the vaulted ceiling. There is no one who could possibly enter this room and not be overwhelmed by immutable bliss and limitless wonder.

The Society of Shambhala

Once we have a clear sense of the space, we then turn our minds to understanding the social structure of those who live in this environment. To be born in Shambhala, one must have produced a significant amount of merit through intensive spiritual practice. This means that every citizen starts their lives endowed with a wealth of virtuous qualities. In particular, they all have phenomenal propensities for love and compassion.

Each child is born to a human mother, but, unlike ordinary birth, there is no pain. While both parents feel an enormous amount of love for their children, they do not view them as their own; instead, they love all children equally, regardless of who physically gave birth to them. In this way, family boundaries are based primarily on proximity and not so heavily on biology. As long as a child needs them, there are adults who are capable of offering support and nurturing them.

From a very early age, children are introduced to the spiritual views emphasized in their particular region. While all spiritual systems in Shambhala are considered to be a part of Kalachakra, different methods are recognized to be more effective for certain types of people. As a result, the specific propensities of a child will determine where exactly in Shambhala they are born; therefore, each child is guaranteed to encounter the spiritual practices best suited for their needs.

Due to their extremely well-developed spiritual qualities, children progress very quickly along their respective paths. Like riding a bicycle, they relearn much of what they were taught in previous lives and so are able to develop deep levels of meditative absorption at a very young age. These advanced states of mind bestow a wide variety of mundane attainments, or *siddhis,* on the practitioners, allowing them to perform extraordinary feats, such as moving over great distances in just a few moments or manifesting many types of psychic capacities. Since food, clothing, and shelter are available in abundance, there is no need for anyone to work for money or for

people to trade in goods. No markets or economies are required. Consequently, the people of Shambhala focus all of their energy on developing their spiritual capacities.

The human body in such a society is viewed as a sacred and powerful support for achieving realizations. Bodies are not regarded on the basis of desire or lust; rather, people learn how to use their sexuality in a constructive and beneficial way. Sex itself is not seen as something to be ashamed of nor as something to be attached to. It is something to be respected and valued as an important aspect of spiritual development. Sexuality is rooted in love and compassion and, therefore, it is never used as a means to control or dominate another.

Within this culture, the leaders of the various kingdoms do not need to impose laws on their people and do not need to rule through might and power. In each of the ninety-six kingdoms, there is a governor who acts as a spiritual role model and mentor for the people within their kingdom. The governors do this by achieving remarkable levels of realization demonstrating the power of spiritual practice. These beings are like shining lights that dispel the darkness around them, showing the way forward toward deeper truths.

While individuals may grow up in one kingdom of Shambhala, they are not attached to the geography nor to its culture. When the time is right, they often travel to other kingdoms where they continue their studies and advance on their spiritual path. The relationships people form are not based on belonging to this or that group but are closely tied to their level of spiritual development. While everyone is considered one family, one's closest relationships are usually with those who are practicing the same methods.

Another common relationship is between students and teachers. Everyone in Shambhala recognizes the responsibility of those with higher realizations to guide and support those with less. As there is no sense of competition, everyone works together to help one another actualize their potential. With such highly developed levels of love and compassion, trust comes easily, so there is no fear of being taken advantage of or being manipulated by one's teacher.

As individuals progress through each stage of their path, they slowly migrate from the outer kingdoms toward the center. Like all rivers flowing into the ocean, everyone eventually arrives at the base of Mount Kailasha. After ascending the mountain, they reach the pleasure groves where they are initiated into the enlightened mandala—the symbolic representation of the ultimate nature of reality. Then, through the uncommon yogic practices of Kalachakra, they enter the city of Kalapa where they are eventually granted an audience with the king. There, they experience the face of Kalachakra and realize the ultimate manifestation of Shambhala.

Making Sense of This Description

When reading a description like this, you may find certain ideas difficult to accept, such as the sheer vastness and scope of this realm. How could such a huge place exist on this planet? Where are all of these cities? Shouldn't we be able to see it from space? All of these types of questions arise when the mind tries to project a fixed understanding of reality onto the flexible reality of the subtle mind. To overcome this problem, it can be helpful to consider a few alternative ways to understand each of the above features.

First, consider the impassable mountain range that acts as a barrier to the outside world. These mountains represent the fact that Shambhala cannot be experienced by a gross level of mind. There is absolutely no way to enter Shambhala without first withdrawing the mind from its physical conditioning. Only by establishing a subtle level of mind can the subtle experience of Shambhala manifest.

Second, consider the way Shambhala is divided into different regions. Since we have already transcended our physical limitations to enter Shambhala, these divisions should not be considered purely geographic in nature. Rather than thinking of them as only spatial divisions, we can also consider them divisions based on karma. Remember that Shambhala is a karmic realm where everyone experiences its reality in a unique way based on their own karmic propensities. If we group the different realms of experience on the

basis of their similarities, we can begin to see how clusters can form into regions, then into kingdoms, and finally into cities. This naturally manifesting organization ensures everyone is surrounded by those who can most effectively support them.

Third, consider the relationship between Kalapa and the rest of Shambhala. The fact that Kalapa is raised up above the other kingdoms indicates that it is subtler in nature. From this perspective, no matter where an individual is born in Shambhala, no matter what methods they use, all roads eventually lead to the center. We can think of these outer regions as representing the provisional truths that are used for a time in order to bring one closer to the definitive truth. As individuals ascend toward the throne room, they refine their experience and unveil more of their ultimate nature. In this way, Shambhala's geographical structure emulates an individual's spiritual progression toward enlightenment.

These are just a few examples of different ways to understand the Sublime Realm of Shambhala in a more flexible and meaningful way. Always remember that the bodhisattvas created this realm out of their infinite compassion for us and that every aspect of its description can be experienced when the right causes and conditions come together.

The Definitive Meaning of Shambhala

Through the provisional meaning of Shambhala, we are able to encounter increasingly more conducive conditions for engaging in authentic spiritual practice. Through such practice, we can clear away the many layers of obscurations that prevent us from realizing our ultimate nature. This process of purifying the mind can be considered preliminary as it prepares the ground for us to work directly with the definitive meaning of Shambhala.

According to the Kalachakra, the definitive meaning begins to arise the very moment the dualistic mind starts to dissolve. At such a time, a yogic practitioner will experience two aspects of the definitive

meaning that can then be used as a basis for nurturing one's realization: empty forms and great bliss. As the dualistic mind becomes weaker and weaker, the true nature of reality begins to manifest more clearly within experience. The practitioner comes to realize that the ultimate nature is not a mere void but is in fact filled with infinite possibilities. Here, *empty* refers to the complete absence of any conceptual projection onto reality, while *form* refers to the enlightened qualities that are manifesting. In other words, this is the appearance of the natural luminosity of reality.

Every moment of experience arises in coemergence with an awareness of reality. For an ordinary being, awareness experiences a distorted reality as a result of grasping onto layers of misconceptions. As the dualistic mind is purified, awareness grasps less and less. This incredible mind of nongrasping is then experienced as increasingly more intense levels of bliss. When fully refined, this bliss becomes immutable, which means that the awareness is completely free from all forms of grasping and, therefore, is not moved by any appearances in the mind.

It is important to understand that merely realizing one of these aspects is not the same as perfecting it. A direct realization is momentary in nature and, therefore, requires a process of familiarization in order to fully integrate that realization into one's experience. When a practitioner first encounters these aspects, he is presented with a phenomenal opportunity. If he is able to abide in that experience, he can use it to unveil increasingly profound layers of experience by clearing away the subtlest traces of habitual propensities. With perseverance, he will eventually remove all forms of obscuration and subsequently manifest as a fully enlightened being.

With this understanding, the question then arises: "How can I experience the definitive meaning?" There are essentially two realms of opportunity: natural realization and induced realization. Natural realization is what occurs in the lives of every sentient being when there are specific moments where the dualistic mind dissolves and the very subtle level of clear-light mind naturally manifests. If a

practitioner can develop sufficient awareness of these very short realms of experience, it is possible to use them as a chance to realize the definitive meaning. For induced realization, instead of waiting for the process of dissolution to occur naturally, through the use of advanced yogic techniques, the conditions can be created to induce the dissolution process. While this method requires considerable effort in order to train the mind, it provides a greater degree of control, allowing the practitioner to extend the number of opportunities to realize the ultimate nature.

While induced realization can be produced through the practice of an authentic spiritual path, natural realization occurs only during the transitional process between one life and the next—what is known as the bardo. Normally, this process occurs without any sense of control or awareness. Therefore, the opportunities for realization are virtually nonexistent for an untrained mind. In order to make use of this period, we need to develop our capacity to maintain awareness throughout the dissolution process, which occurs at the time of death.

When we previously discussed the provisional meaning, we began with the gross level and moved to the subtle. Due to the nature of the death process, we will now reverse that order and look first at the subtler of the two manifestations of the definitive Shambhala.

The Ultimate Shambhala That Arises at the Time of Death

At the time of death, we all experience a process of dissolution in which the body ceases to function as a support for the mind's experience. Essentially, the body and mind separate. For some, this process can be fast (such as in a car accident), while for others it can be a slow and drawn out experience (as with a terminal illness). Regardless of how long this process takes, the result is always the same.

First, the mind's connection with the gross physical body dissolves. This culminates in what modern science refers to as clinical death. In the Buddhist view of death, this is only a preliminary stage of the

process, which is why Buddhists do not disturb the body until the process of dissolution is complete.

After the gross dissolution, the mind then dissolves its connection with the person's subtle physical body—an energetic body that serves as a very subtle support for the conceptual patterns of the mind. As this energy stops circulating, the dualistic mind naturally dissolves. The end of this subtle dissolution process marks the moment of a person's actual death. For most, this whole process is experienced as a sort of blackout. The mind loses consciousness and is completely unaware of what is going on.

However, those who have trained in meditation are able to maintain lucid awareness throughout this process and report that in the moment arising right after the dissolution of the dualistic mind, there is a brief opportunity for natural realization. At this time, nothing is manifesting other than the great bliss of awareness. If you can rest your awareness in the recognition of this reality, you will experience what can be referred to as "The Ultimate Realm of Shambhala That Arises at the Time of Death." Abiding in this state of ultimate peace and harmony will eventually dissolve all karmic propensities and thus allow for the full manifestation of perfect and complete enlightenment.

The Pure Realm of Shambhala

With the Ultimate Shambhala manifesting for little more than a single moment of experience, the vast majority of people miss this opportunity. They go on to reestablish a basic connection between a subtle energetic body and a dualistic mind. They awaken from a state of unconsciousness and find themselves in the dreamlike reality of the bardo. With no knowledge of what is happening to them, they bounce around from dreamworld to dreamworld until finally the conditions come together for them to take another gross rebirth. At this point, they connect their subtle body with the gross physical body of whatever type of birth they are going to take.

For those who have trained with empty forms in this life, the transitional period presents a second opportunity to realize the definitive meaning of Shambhala. We can think of the death process like a bouncing ball. The ball falling is like the dissolution process of death, the moment in which the nondualistic mind manifests is like the ball hitting the ground, and the rest of the process is the ball reversing direction and traveling back upward.

The key to making use of this process is again tied to the degree of awareness we are able to bring to the experience. The more awareness, the slower this process will unfold. It would be like filming the ball impacting with the ground in super slow motion. What you would see is that within the space of the nondualistic mind, different patterns of light begin to manifest. As the dualistic mind has not yet formed, there is a brief moment in which you could recognize these appearances as empty forms. If you can rest your mind without grasping on to these forms, then you will naturally experience the Pure Realm of Shambhala.

This realm is a nondualistic experience of the manifest nature of reality. Within it, all forms are experienced as deities, all sounds as mantras, and all thoughts as pure wisdom. It is the natural manifestation of the enlightened mandala of Kalachakra and represents the way reality is perceived by highly realized beings such as the Dharma kings of Shambhala. Through the skillful means of empty forms, this realm is the ultimate perfection of harmony. From within this harmony, the mind naturally dissolves into perfect peace.

It is within this Pure Realm of Shambhala that all of the buddha realms described in the scriptures exist. When they describe this or that buddha giving rise to this or that realm, they are not talking about separate physical realms. They are in fact describing the way that empty forms arise to individuals who have a dominant connection to a particular buddha family.[*] For instance, a practitioner who has developed strong connections to the lotus family of Amitabha would experience the Pure Realm of Shambhala as Sukhavati.

Making Every Action Count

For some, reading about these different realms may seem too far removed from your present life. It may seem almost impossible that you could achieve any of these phenomenal results. You may reject these ideas, telling yourself that they are for someone else.

It is true that most people will not attain the highest result in this lifetime. But that does not mean that your efforts are wasted. With every action, you can be laying down the seeds for any one of these potentials to manifest. No matter where you are in your spiritual development, you can always take steps forward. You don't have to wait for someone else to do something. You don't have to wait for conditions to change. You don't have to postpone your own happiness.

If you do nothing, it is difficult to receive any benefit. If, however, you use whatever energy you can to create the causes for Shambhala, then you can be sure that your time will be well spent. Sooner or later, the fruits will definitely ripen. So, don't wait. Make the most of this precious opportunity while you still can.

Skip Notes

* In total, there are six buddha families: (1) the karma family of Amoghasiddhi, (2) the jewel family of Ratnasambhava, (3) the lotus family of Amitabha, (4) the wheel family of Vairochana, (5) the vajra family of Akshobhya, and (6) the curved knife family of Vajrasattva.

5

Patterns of Transformation

The key to manifesting the experience of Shambhala is recognizing that it is a process. As long as we are operating under the conditioning of our karmic propensities, then change inevitably happens over time. From the moment a propensity is created to the moment that it ripens, thousands of lifetimes can come and go. The more complex the result, the more conditions are needed to come together in exactly the right way for it to ripen, and, therefore, the more difficult it is for us to experience it.

If we consider the scope of all of our potential experiences, we can get a sense of the immense good fortune we have to be alive in this time and place. The teachings of Shambhala are just beginning to expand outward, and for the first time in our history, the complete Kalachakra path is finally becoming available on a global scale. This not only gives us an amazing opportunity to make powerful karmic connections with the tradition, but it also provides us with the chance to put these teachings into practice. By doing so, we create the causes to experience the Sublime Realm of Shambhala.

However, in order to fully grasp the opportunities that are emerging, we must develop awareness of the patterns of transformation that mark the manifestation of Shambhala. You can think of these as being like signposts that indicate you are traveling in the right direction. If we fail to see these signs, then it is possible

that we will miss the opportunities, similar to how one misses the turnoff while traveling on a highway.

For this reason, in this chapter, we will explore the process of transformation that the conventional realm of Shambhala has undergone over the last few millennia. Through developing greater understanding of this evolution, we can identify the key conditions that are required for such an experience to take shape. From this perspective, the history of Shambhala itself becomes our blueprint for how to bring about a similar transformation in our own realm of experience.

The Foundation of Love and Compassion

According to the history recorded in the great commentary of Kalachakra, while the introduction of the teachings of Kalachakra marked a major shift in the culture of the land, the kingdom itself had existed before the *Kalachakra Tantra* was ever taught, the implication being that the Sublime Realm of Shambhala has not always been the subtle realm of opportunity that it is today. While there is currently no physical evidence of an ancient civilization matching the descriptions found in the texts, this does not mean that it did not exist. It simply means that we, in this realm of experience, have lost our gross connection to it. Since there is great benefit in reflecting on the evolution of this kingdom, I would like to offer you the following description, which I personally find very helpful.

For me, Shambhala began as a coarser realm similar to the other kingdoms of its time. However, what made this kingdom unique was that its kings were emanations of highly realized bodhisattvas. Through the profound karmic connections these bodhisattvas cultivated over countless lifetimes, they acted as powerful magnets for those with particularly strong propensities for love and compassion. As a result of their influence, the kingdom of Shambhala flourished in both worldly and spiritual matters.

Based on the prevalence of myths in the region, and due to the references in texts to being north of India and northwest of Tibet, I believe that the physical location of Shambhala was most likely situated somewhere within the region of central Asia. This meant that Shambhala would have been positioned in the center of many ancient civilizations that arose during prehistoric times. When you combine Shambhala's central geographic location with the peaceful leadership of its ruler, it makes sense that many people would be drawn there.

What began as a single settlement soon expanded to include ninety-six surrounding villages. Those who settled in Shambhala came from all over the neighboring regions, bringing with them their original culture and belief systems. Under the patient guidance of their king, these different cultures were able to live harmoniously alongside one another. This gave rise to great prosperity in the region, fueling considerable growth—the villages turned into cities and those cities became surrounded by more villages.

The king selected the most spiritually developed from each region to become champions for the people. Out of their great compassion, these governors worked hard to implement honorable laws that demonstrated the power of karma and protected the citizens from destructive ways of thinking. Because of their lack of competitiveness and their profound love for the people, they successfully created an environment that offered safety to its citizens and the opportunity for all citizens to maximize their potential.

Thinking in this way illustrates to us that basic human goodness is the foundation upon which the definitive meaning can grow. We can think of it like the fertile soil in which we plant the seeds of our own enlightenment. Everything begins with love and compassion. When these values become our main priority, harmony naturally arises and our virtuous karma begins to ripen. This is the first sign.

Requesting the Teachings of Definitive Meaning

Under the leadership of its benevolent rulers, many generations passed, and Shambhala was truly flourishing. The king of Shambhala at this time was named Suchandra, an emanation of the bodhisattva Vajrapani. He recognized that many people in Shambhala were ready to receive teachings on the definitive nature of reality.

While Suchandra himself was a highly realized being, he knew the infinite complexity of karma was beyond even his capacity to fully understand. Only a buddha has perfected all qualities and removed all limitations, so only a buddha is capable of seeing everything that needs to be done. In order to overcome the subtlest of obscurations and reveal the ultimate nature of reality, the king would need to receive teachings from a fully enlightened being.

Through the power of his clairvoyance, Suchandra searched for such a being and found Shakyamuni Buddha, who had achieved enlightenment in India. At that time, the Buddha was manifesting outwardly as a monk meditating on Vulture Peak Mountain just outside the village of Rajagriha. While the Buddha's mind was absorbed in the definitive meaning of the nature of reality, he manifested in different ways for the benefit of his disciples.

The Buddha inspired the mind of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who then gave the teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras to highly realized disciples, the monks who meditated with him, and the host of bodhisattvas gathered there. In accordance with the subtlety of the mind of those who heard these teachings, different versions were recorded, resulting in eight main texts ranging from as many as a hundred thousand verses down to just a few.

At the same time, on an even subtler level, the Buddha's wisdom mind rested in the aspect of the Primordial Buddha—the ultimate nature of reality—and from within this indestructible absorption, he manifested the completely enlightened mandala of the deity Kalachakra to the bodhisattva king Suchandra. It was to this form that Suchandra would make his request for teachings.

Suchandra, along with the governors of the ninety-six kingdoms of Shambhala, entered this deeply profound state of absorption, allowing them to experience the divine body of the Buddha. In the

presence of a great host of bodhisattvas, gods, and other subtle beings, King Suchandra requested the Buddha to turn the wheel of tantra and to teach the profound methods for realizing the definitive meaning within a single lifetime.

Out of his infinite compassion, the Buddha granted Suchandra's request and bestowed on him the most precious and rare teaching of the resultant path. King Suchandra and his governors received the teaching of definitive meaning directly from the mouth of Kalachakra. This vast and profound teaching presented an ocean of methods for guiding anyone to the deepest, most transcendental experience of ultimate reality.

For those who could not comprehend the sheer vastness of this teaching, the Buddha simultaneously taught a variety of provisional tantras in accordance with the capacities of those sentient beings. In this way, the four classes of Buddhist tantra were presented.

Once the Buddha had completed his teaching, Suchandra and the governors emerged from their meditation, returning their minds to Shambhala. There, Suchandra proceeded to write down the entire teaching he had received. This text became known as the *Kalachakra Root Tantra: The Sublime Primordial Buddha of Twelve Thousand Verses*.

Here, the relationship between teacher and requestor was established. This illustrates an important interdependence. The definitive meaning of reality is the subtlest and most hidden phenomena imaginable. It is so subtle that only a Buddha can fully comprehend it. Therefore, if we wish to experience the absolute truth of Shambhala, we must rely on the teachings of the Buddha himself.

However, while the Buddha only ever teaches the perfect truth, how much of the teachings are received will depend entirely on the state of mind of the person who hears those teachings. Because the student was in this case the bodhisattva Vajrapani, the teachings that he committed into writing are without reproach and flawless. When such teachings exist within one's realm of experience, it is like holding the seed of Shambhala in one's hand. This is the second sign.

Providing the Supports for Practice

Before he could begin propagating the Kalachakra teachings in Shambhala, Suchandra knew that he would first need to prepare the ground. If his subjects were to practice the methods described in the root tantra, they needed to be empowered by introducing them to the enlightened mandala of Kalachakra. To this end, he began construction of a massive three-dimensional representation of the mandala within the Malaya Pleasure Grove to the east of Kalapa.

He built each detail using the finest of materials, adorning every aspect with jewels and ornaments. When the four levels of this magnificent palace were completed, he filled them with statues of each deity, meticulously sculpted in accordance with the descriptions in the root tantra. Through his unwavering devotion to the teachings, he made special effort to ensure the entire mandala was totally free from errors and was a completely accurate and faithful representation of the enlightened body, speech, mind, and primordial wisdom of Kalachakra.

Upon completion of this enormous endeavor, Suchandra consecrated the building by conducting the first Kalachakra empowerment for the royal court of Shambhala. Everyone from the great city of Kalapa—as well as delegations from each of the ninety-six kingdoms—gathered in the massive hall to receive this extraordinary blessing from the king. Through this ceremony, the participants received all of the empowerments they required to begin practicing the teachings.

Recognizing that the root tantra was virtually impossible for anyone other than the most highly realized of bodhisattvas to comprehend, King Suchandra wrote a supplementary text to explain each line of the text. Through the vastness of his vision and the profundity of his wisdom, the king wrote a sixty-thousand verse commentary that would become the primary source for all study and practice of Kalachakra. As a result of this incredible display of Suchandra's immeasurable kindness, an astounding level of

realization arose in the minds of the princes of Kalapa and the Shambhalan governors.

Before the seed of definitive meaning could be planted into the fertile ground of love and compassion, that ground needed to be tilled and fertilized through the ritual of empowerment. In this ceremony, Suchandra created the conditions for those who were ripe to experience their buddha nature directly. This experience is like planting the seed in the ground.

It should be noted, however, that not everyone in Shambhala had the good fortune to receive empowerment from Suchandra at that time. If he had tried to introduce them to their nature before they were ripe, then it would have been like planting the seed into rocky ground. The seed would not have survived. Instead, he identified those who were ready and gave them everything they needed to be able to put the instructions into practice. The third sign is having the supports for practice, such as authentic masters who can give empowerments and authentic commentaries upon which to rely.

Establishing the Teachings

After spending the rest of his life teaching and practicing Kalachakra, King Suchandra's reign came to an end. In his place, the rule of Shambhala passed to his son Sureshvara. The new king faithfully carried on the work his father had begun, granting numerous empowerments to the citizens of Kalapa and to an increasing number of people from the outer kingdoms.

While only a relative minority of the Shambhalan population practiced the Kalachakra at this time, those who did were able to achieve remarkable degrees of realization. For this reason, the *Kalachakra Tantra* quickly gained a reputation for being an extraordinarily efficient system of practice.

Over the course of the next six hundred years, the phenomenal example of the Shambhalan leadership contributed to an ever-growing appreciation for the *Kalachakra Tantra*. Through the power

of their accomplishments, these great beings demonstrated their extraordinary capacity and inspired their people to push well beyond the boundaries of what they had previously thought possible.

What we see here is that through the faith and determination of these early generations of Kalachakra practitioners, the efficacy of the system was established. Like roots stretching down into the ground, the direct realizations of the definitive meaning arose in their minds. This gave them unwavering confidence in the lineage of the teachings, the teachers who transmitted their blessings, and the nature that was realized through putting them into practice. These three confidences are the fourth sign.

Abandoning Ignorance and Bias

By around the turn of the first century BCE, Kalachakra had become firmly established within the culture of Shambhala. For seven generations, the rulers had successfully raised the profile of the Kalachakra teachings, proving it to be a system that was both reliable and effective. Despite the universal respect that the Kalachakra had received, when compared to the many other belief systems practiced at that time, only a relatively small population were ready for its profound wisdom. This meant that within the general public of Shambhala, many still focused on their ancestral beliefs and practices.

At this particular time, the king of Shambhala was an emanation of Manjushri's wisdom, known as Yashas. He had been closely observing the customs and behaviors of the Shambhalan people and noticed there were a number of disturbing trends present within the realm. Using the power of his clairvoyance, he was able to see both the short-term effects and the farreaching consequences these habits would have for the kingdom.

Specifically, Yashas recognized that the Shambhalan citizens were creating barriers of both ignorance and bias. If left unchecked, he knew these beliefs would grow to dominate their minds and would

fan the flames of suffering and conflict. Like a concerned parent who sees his child engaging in destructive activities, the king saw the necessity to take action to correct the wrong views of his people. While the king would go on to bring reforms into all levels of Shambhalan society, the *Kalachakra Tantra* speaks of one specific encounter between Yashas and the Brahmin community led by the sage Suryaratha.

Manjushri Yashas was a master of all of the wisdom traditions present in Shambhala. He had studied and practiced extensively in each system and was perfectly capable of guiding any of his subjects in accordance with their needs. In many ways, he was the original nonsectarian master. From his vast perspective, each system was a skillful means for unveiling the definitive truth of Kalachakra. When practiced authentically and deeply, they were all effective stepping-stones for ripening the minds of practitioners and preparing them to realize the ultimate truth.

Within this context, the king did not introduce his reforms from the viewpoint of an outsider looking in, but rather he gathered together all the leaders of the Brahmin community and gave them an exhaustive presentation of the Vedic teachings. For the most part, each Brahmin was only familiar with isolated portions of their canon. As there were so many texts to study, they had chosen to specialize in only a handful of the treatises. By presenting all of the texts side by side, Yashas was able to highlight numerous inconsistencies that he felt were responsible for a number of serious misconceptions. Of these, he chose to focus on two in particular.

The first was in relation to the Vedic practice of using animal sacrifice as a means to gain the favor of worldly gods. At its root, such a practice reinforced the self-cherishing bias that the self is more important than others. Yashas recognized that the use of violence in this way would always act as a barrier for developing a deeper sense of peace and harmony. Instead of bringing them closer to the truth, it would push them further away. A society that did not value all forms of life would eventually give way to conflict and war. For this reason, the king asked the Brahmins to give up this practice.

The second issue the king identified was the division of the community into different castes. This system of social segregation effectively placed individuals into boxes with clearly designated roles to play in society. While this facilitated some functional aspects, its primary effect was to limit the spiritual potential of the vast majority of the people. Within such a system, only the Brahmin, or holy caste, was allowed to study and practice the Vedas, and so only the Brahmins had the opportunity to develop the profound realizations that were its result.

In addition, the caste system projected artificial barriers between people, preventing them from relating with each other in a meaningful way. Members of one caste were discouraged from associating with members of another. The king knew that such forms of segregation would fuel bias within the minds of the people. As long as this sort of bias existed, realization of the ultimate expression of unity could never occur. The king, therefore, requested the Brahmins to also relinquish this practice.

By first developing a broad mastery of a wide variety of traditions, Manjushri Yashas was able to develop a vast perspective. That perspective allowed him to see the big picture—to see how everything fit together. In doing so, he was able to identify the obstacles that prevented individuals from moving closer to their ultimate truth. This is what it means to establish an unbiased mind—a rime philosophy. Through breadth, one is able to establish depth. This is like tending the ground around a seedling to protect it from weeds and predators, thus giving it the opportunity to grow tall and strong. When we are not afraid to analyze our faults in this way and strive to abandon our ignorance and bias, then this is the fifth sign.

Unifying as a Single Vajra Family

Even though King Yashas explained the reasons for his request with great clarity and skill, he knew the Brahmins were attached to these practices and would not easily give them up. He decided to issue a

decree declaring that all the citizens of Shambhala would receive the blessings of the Kalachakra empowerment in recognition that they all belonged to one indestructible caste—a single vajra family created out of the recognition of their ultimate nature. From that day forward, there was to be no discrimination of one group over the next. They would all live together in unity, developing meaningful relationships with each other and supporting each other in whatever way was needed. Those who would not accept this decree would be asked to leave Shambhala.

The Brahmins pleaded with their leader, Suryaratha, to intervene as they could not abide by this ruling of the king. They were convinced that the king was trying to convert them to another system. Suryaratha respectfully declined the king's command and chose to lead his people southward toward the land of India where he knew the Vedic teachings were flourishing. In a massive exodus, the Brahmins made their way to the borders of Shambhala—turning their backs on the king and Kalachakra.

Through this action of the Brahmin community, Yashas knew that if he did not attempt to change their minds, people throughout Shambhala would see this as a rejection of the wisdom of Kalachakra. If they developed this wrong view, it was only a matter of time before they too would abandon the kingdom. Faced with this potential outcome, the king decided to take a more extreme measure by displaying the power of his own attainments.

As the Brahmins journeyed to India, they entered a dense jungle. By the power of his meditative absorption, Manjushri Yashas caused them all to fall into a deep slumber. Then, with the help of the beings living in that forest, the bodies of the Brahmins were carried back to the Malaya Grove, just outside of Kalapa. There, at the foot of the Kalachakra mandala, the Brahmins were overwhelmed with amazement and wonder. They asked, "Who could have brought us to such a magnificent place?"

In that moment, a trusted advisor to the king appeared before Suryaratha. He explained that Manjushri Yashas was indeed a great bodhisattva and everything he had asked them to abandon was done

with a pure intention of unconditional love and compassion—without bias and without self-centered attachment. He was not ordering them to surrender their beliefs; he was asking them to transcend them—to abandon their limitations and realize the definitive meaning within their own system.

The minds of Suryaratha and all of the Brahmins were filled with an enormous faith in the king's wisdom and compassion. With one voice, they expressed their desire to take refuge in the king as their teacher and to receive the blessings of the Kalachakra empowerment. In the presence of Yashas, they made extensive offerings, received the empowerments, and were welcomed into the vajra family.

Like the Brahmins, to many, it may seem like Yashas was trying to convert everyone in Shambhala to Buddhism. This is a misconception that will only serve to limit the benefit the Kalachakra teachings can offer. For this reason, let's take a moment to address this issue.

If we think back to our discussion of the four reliances, we will remember the second reliance warned against holding too tightly to a single presentation of an idea. Instead, it advised us to look beyond our different interpretations and connect with the underlying meaning it presented—not only provisionally but also definitively. It is true that the people who uphold the Kalachakra teachings in this world are labeled as Buddhists, but this does not make Kalachakra an exclusively Buddhist path.

The term *Kalachakra* is a label used to refer to the ultimate nature of reality. It is a level of truth that transcends all provisional forms of spirituality. The term *Buddhism* is also a label used to refer to a spiritual system that arose from the teachings of the historical Buddha. From the perspective of the definitive truth, Kalachakra is not Buddhist. In a certain way, we can even say that the Buddha is not Buddhist. These are merely imputations that we use to refer to different aspects of our reality.

The truth of reality is not the sole domain of any one tradition. There is no such thing as Buddhist truth, Christian truth, or Islamic truth. Truth is simply truth. The paths to realizing that truth,

however, can take a variety of forms. Some paths will provide part of the truth, while others will allow us to see more. How much truth a path can reveal will depend entirely on the karmic propensities of the individual.

In this context, we can see that King Yashas was not converting people from one provisional system to another. He was trying to help them to remove the barriers within their own system of practice that prevented them from realizing the ultimate truth. Through the wisdom presented within the *Kalachakra Tantra,* he provided them with a new lens through which to examine their own understanding. In this process he became the first Kalki—the Holder of the Family.

From this example, we see that the underlying intention of the Kalachakra teachings is unity. As long as we are divided, we are weak and incapable of experiencing our full potential. Together, we are powerful and our nature is complete. That which unites us is our shared buddha nature. It is like the sturdy trunk of a tree that holds its ground in the face of wind and rain. This is the sixth sign.

The Kalachakra Teachings Flourish

After successfully unifying his people through the wisdom of Kalachakra, for the first time ever, the leaders of the different traditions were able to reveal the definitive meaning of their own teachings. Very quickly, the citizens of Shambhala were inspired to seek out and study the *Kalachakra Tantra* as a way to transcend their own limitations. At the request of the Brahmin community, Manjushri Yashas wrote an abridged version of Suchandra's *Primordial Buddha*. In five condensed chapters, Yashas presents the essential meaning in a way that facilitated its study and made it accessible to a wider audience of people. This text became known as the *Abridged Tantra—The Glorious Kalachakra.*

Even after King Yashas had clarified a significant amount of the teachings, it was still considerably more advanced than most people were accustomed to. Out of his great compassion, Pundarika—the

second Kalki king—wrote a commentary to his father's treatise called *Stainless Light*. This commentary expanded upon many of the esoteric concepts presented in *The Glorious Kalachakra*. These two texts rapidly spread throughout the ninety-six kingdoms of Shambhala.

Centuries passed under the profound guidance of the Kalki kings, and Kalachakra grew in popularity as increasing numbers of people began to realize the definitive meaning it held. Soon, the boundaries between one belief system and the next began to dissolve, and the citizens developed a truly unbiased philosophy. Without losing sight of the authentic wisdom of their traditions, practitioners were able to penetrate into deeper levels of experience. Slowly, the entire population was able to purify the way they perceived reality itself.

As a result of the powerful karmic connections the people of Shambhala had formed with the bodhisattva kings of Kalapa and with the teachings of Kalachakra, everyone who had not yet achieved enlightenment continued to be born into this realm. This enabled them to continue their spiritual practice and to achieve levels of realization that were previously unknown to them. As their minds became subtler, so too did the realm itself. Over time, this manifestation of Shambhala evolved to such a degree that it could no longer be experienced by the gross minds of ordinary beings. Thus, the Sublime Realm of Shambhala had finally become manifest.

Due to the advanced spiritual development of the beings now born in Shambhala, less of the provisional systems of the past were needed. Individuals were quickly able to achieve the foundational realizations required for working with the definitive meaning directly, and so the vast majority focused their energy on the skillful practices of tantric paths. Eventually, the population came to rely exclusively on the vast teachings of the *Kalachakra Tantra*.

What this demonstrates is that the teachings are not static. They are constantly evolving. However, evolution does not necessarily mean degeneration. When the definitive meaning is fully understood, then the teachings can be expressed in a variety of different ways. Even though the abridged tantra of Manjushri Yashas

was a fraction of the size of the root tantra, it was a perfect expression of the essential meaning.

Likewise, even though the extensive commentary of Suchandra existed, the teachings of Kalki Pundarika provided a much more digestible format that opened the teachings to a new audience. Such flexibility allowed the teachings to spread far and wide, like the beautiful branches of a tree adorned with rich foliage and fragrant flowers. This flourishing is the seventh sign.

A Summary

To summarize this process, it all begins with love and compassion. That is the foundation. Out of that compassion comes a search for deeper meaning and the desire to unravel the causes of suffering. That aspiration is the guiding principle behind transcending layers and layers of provisional meanings until finally coming to the threshold of the definitive meaning.

When beings are ripened in this way, Kalachakra is introduced. At first, it is obscure and hidden, accessible to only a few. But then, as the teachings are studied, people gain greater understanding of its nuances. Then, through putting their understanding into practice, they experience the most profound truth directly. It is that crucial step that gives them confidence in their nature and unlocks their dormant potential.

As a result of gaining a vast perspective on reality, they are able to see the misconceptions and bias that limit others. Then, through skillful means, those misconceptions are removed and people learn how to embrace the definitive meaning in the context of their own traditions. As they abandon their bias, more and more people become ripe for being introduced to Kalachakra. Not seeing this change as an abandonment of their beliefs, they embrace it as a natural progression toward truth.

Then, there is a transition period where a great diversity of expressions of Kalachakra arise within the various kingdoms as

people work to integrate the new ideas. If this were happening today, we could imagine various strains of the teachings, such as Buddhist Kalachakra, Hindu Kalachakra, Christian Kalachakra, Muslim Kalachakra, and so forth. While each embraces truth from a different perspective, through Kalachakra, they come to focus on the definitive meaning. Then, through the experience of that meaning, the artificial barriers that divide them are dissolved away and what remains is merely Shambhala—the nature of reality as it is. The unified nature of all expressions is finally seen to be one. By abiding in that nature, the external perception of suffering and conflict also dissolves away and the experience of perfect peace and harmony becomes manifest.

6

Discovering the Dharma of Definitive Meaning

From our previous analysis, one thing becomes crystal clear—the experience of perfect peace and harmony, the complete manifestation of Shambhala, is rooted in the joining of the mind of love and compassion with the Buddha's teachings of definitive meaning. When these conditions come together, the result is a complete transformation of individuals and the societies to which they belong.

Since these teachings are the main cause for giving rise to a golden age of perfect peace and harmony, they are known as the Dzokden Dharma. *Dzokden* is a Tibetan word meaning "to be endowed with perfection or completeness." It is also used to refer to the period of time when a golden age will manifest. For those who seek to manifest such a result in this world, how quickly we are able to accomplish our goal will depend entirely on our capacity to identify and then work with the Dzokden Dharma. Therefore, in this chapter, we will explore exactly what teachings to rely on, what their unique qualities are, and where we can find them in our world.

Distinguishing the Sources to Rely On

The Dzokden Dharma is defined as all of those teachings that were given by masters who have realized the ultimate truth of buddha nature. Such sublime beings have a complete view of reality and are able to clearly distinguish between what is provisional and what is definitive. Therefore, these masters are beyond reproach and can be relied upon without doubt. There are five types of such masters.

First, there are the omniscient buddhas. These are the fully enlightened beings who abide in the ultimate truth and, therefore, all of their teachings are either direct or indirect teachings about the definitive meaning. Whatever words they say can only bring benefit to the minds of sentient beings and, therefore, should be considered the most trustworthy of teachings. That being said, from among the three turnings that were taught by the present buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, it is the third turning that directly teaches buddha nature and, therefore, it is the third turning that belongs to the Dzokden Dharma.

Second, there are the tenth-level bodhisattvas. These unrivaled heart disciples of the Buddha are the great bodhisattva kings of Shambhala such as Vajrapani, Manjushri, and Avalokiteshvara, as well as the Buddha's own regent, the bodhisattva Maitreya. With their completely pure minds, they are able to perfectly comment on the teachings of the Buddha and clarify its final intention.

Third, there are the two supreme ones. In the Buddha's own words, two great pioneers of the Mahayana were prophesied to arise in India. The first was the bodhisattva Arya Nagarjuna, who was prophesied to establish the Middle Way philosophy. The second was the bodhisattva Arya Asanga, who was prophesied to clearly distinguish the provisional from the definitive. These two are considered to have taught in accord with the Buddha's own final intention and are completely noncontradictory.

Fourth, there are the six ornaments. Based on the completeness of the view and practice of the two supreme ones, six extraordinary masters arose from among their direct disciples—Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, Gunaprabha, and Shakyaprabha. These six had a flawless understanding of the

intention of their masters and wrote extensive commentaries to expand on the subjects of philosophy, logic, and ethical discipline.

Fifth, there are the Indian and Tibetan mahasiddhas. In reliance on the teachings of these previous four groups, when practitioners then relied on the extraordinarily profound method of *vajra yoga* (which is presented both directly and indirectly in the unsurpassed tantras), they gave rise to inexpressible degrees of realization. From their direct experience of buddha nature, they were able to write a vast array of pith instructions and commentaries that unlock the experience of the definitive meaning.

Only these five sources can be considered authentic sources of Dzokden Dharma, for only these sources directly teach the pervasive, permanent, and ultimately true nature that is the primordial wisdom endowed with all aspects. The teachings of other masters should be considered teachings of provisional meaning and will ultimately need to be transcended.

Here, it is important to remember that simply because a teaching is provisional, that does not make it worthless. It simply means that it is a temporary method that we rely on in order to ripen our minds so that we can be ready to access a deeper level of teachings. Provisional methods are fundamental to get us to where we need to be. Therefore, be vigilant to avoid allowing pride and arrogance to arise in your mind. The only reason that someone is able to understand the teachings of the Dzokden Dharma now is because they embraced authentic provisional teachings in the past. Please remember this.

Distinguishing the Qualities to Rely On

When we look at the massive corpus of works produced by the masters of the Dzokden Dharma, the question then arises whether all of these teachings are equal. The answer is yes and no. While they are all equal in the profundity of their understanding of the view, they vary in relation to a number of important qualities. Since our

goal is to manifest a golden age as quickly as possible, and since we don't know how long we will have the precious conditions of this human life, we owe it to ourselves to clearly identify the specific Dharma that can best achieve our goal.

Direct versus Indirect

Let's start by looking at the quality of directness. Since buddha nature can only be experienced by a nonconceptual mind, any teaching that works with buddha nature through concepts is, by definition, an indirect teaching. Because the dualistic mind is active, you never really touch the experience of buddha nature. At best, these teachings allow you to develop a clear view of what buddha nature is and why you would want to realize it.

This division is most clearly seen in the teachings of sutra and tantra. In sutra, you are essentially working with interdependent appearances. These are the projections of karma. Our goal in sutra is to manipulate our karma in order to eventually transcend it. This is like using a log as fuel for a fire. The fire depends on the log, but it also is the cause for the destruction of the log. Similarly, the sutric teachings on emptiness depend on the nature of karma in order to eventually destroy those same propensities.

Compare this with tantra—specifically, unsurpassed tantra. Only in these highest of teachings do we find the information for working directly with the subtle energetic body. These teachings are the gateway that allows us to move from the indirect world of concepts into the direct world of nonconceptual primordial wisdom. By relying on their pith instructions, we can bypass our karma and finally experience suchness directly. This is what makes tantra so unbelievably powerful and efficient. It cuts through the obscurations like a lightning bolt and brings you face to face with your most sacred truth.

Therefore, if we wish to manifest the golden age quickly, then we need to rely on the direct methods as found in the various systems of unsurpassed tantra. This does not mean that we abandon the sutras.

We still use them provisionally as methods to prepare ourselves for working with tantra.

Complete versus Incomplete

The second distinction that we need to make is in relation to the quality of completeness. Some teachings provide specific methods that allow you to clear away specific types of obscurations. Others provide a series of practices that work together to produce a desired result. This is the difference between an isolated technique and a path. A technique is specialized, while a path provides a more complete presentation of the relationships between techniques and a process of desired transformation.

However, within paths, there are still degrees. Take, for instance, the path of the Foundational Vehicle. It is a complete path in the sense that it provides all of the techniques needed to allow an ordinary sentient being to achieve personal liberation from suffering. Likewise, the Vehicle of the Solitary Realizers will allow one to achieve that same state without the reliance on masters. Both of these, however, are seen as incomplete from the perspective of the Bodhisattva Vehicle because they do not achieve the ultimate result of buddhahood.

In the context of Shambhala, we can see that some teachings will provide us clear paths for cultivating the causes for experiencing greater aspects of Shambhala, but they will not necessarily take us all the way to experiencing the sublime, pure, or ultimate manifestations of Shambhala. Such teachings are perfectly valid, but they are incomplete. In general, we should rely on those teachings that are as complete as possible. They must include instructions all the way up to perfect and complete enlightenment. By relying on such teachings, we can be confident that every action we perform will contribute to accomplishing not only our temporary goals but also our ultimate ones as well.

Extensive versus Narrow

The third quality is the quality of expansiveness. This refers to how broad an audience the teaching is suitable for. Some teachings are really only suitable for advanced practitioners of the sharpest faculties. Others are focused on those with middling or lesser faculties. Likewise, there are some teachings that are suitable for people with a particular disposition, while others are suitable for a wider range of attitudes and perspectives.

Whether a teaching has an expansive or a narrow focus will directly impact the number of people that can benefit from that teaching. As we will see in the coming chapters, this is a very important point when it comes to manifesting Shambhala on a global scale. In order to effectively achieve our goal, we will need to rely on teachings that are suitable for the broadest range of people.

Note that this does not mean that the teachings should be "dumbed down" to fit with the lowest common denominator. It means that the path we rely on needs to be able to hold a great diversity of methods within a cohesive container. It needs to be flexible enough to provide clear pathways for people of all levels of capacity and backgrounds to work toward a common outcome, regardless of where they personally are along the path.

Clear versus Hidden

The fourth quality that we must consider is the quality of clarity. This refers to the level of detail that is described and the accessibility of the language used to describe those details. When we analyze teachings from this perspective, we can see that some texts are written in symbolic or poetic language that obscures or hides the intended meaning. Instead of speaking directly to a point, the text may, for instance, rely on different obscure metaphors and analogies. There are also other teachings that are simply vague or ill defined. They may perhaps be concise or essential presentations and, therefore, lack details, or they may also purposefully withhold details in order to force students to seek out the guidance of teachers knowledgeable in the hidden meanings.

In a world where qualified masters are bountiful, having this sort of hidden teaching is not such an issue. Students have ample opportunities to clarify doubts and unlock the many secrets held within the teaching. However, in times when qualified masters are rare, it becomes increasingly more difficult for students to understand how to use these teachings on the path. Without the proper guidance, they introduce mistakes and transform a teaching of definitive meaning into one of provisional. Thus, the teaching degenerates over time and is no longer able to fulfill its function.

However, when a teaching itself is written in a clear and detailed fashion, then it allows students to develop a considerably more accurate understanding of the meaning without the same degree of dependence on teachers. Instead of the teacher being used primarily as a reference for translating hidden meanings into clear ones, the relationship between teacher and disciple can focus more on the experiential guidance that is vital for putting the teachings into practice.

Another advantage of having clear teachings is that they are naturally more accessible to a much wider audience. Take, for example, modern science. Part of the reason that scientific methods have been so widely adopted is because they are extremely detailed and extremely clear. This allows people from all over the world to acquire expertise through a gradual building up of core principles and techniques. While teachers and mentors are still vital to the process, there is a significant portion of learning that is self-driven by the practitioners themselves. As more practitioners gain proficiency, qualified teachers become more bountiful and, therefore, more people are exposed to the teachings and can access their benefits.

Specific versus General

The last quality we will be looking at is the quality of generality. This refers to the nature of a teaching's relationship with Shambhala. In general, we can say that any teaching that is rooted in love and compassion is a general cause for experiencing aspects of

Shambhala. However, such teachings are not very strong causes for experiencing the specific manifestation of the Sublime Realm of Shambhala.

Likewise, there are many advanced teachings that train yogis to master the death process so that they can experience the Ultimate Shambhala, or teachings such as those that allow one to direct one's consciousness toward one of the buddha realms of the Pure Shambhala. For those practitioners who are very ripe to take advantage of these teachings, they are incredibly powerful, but they still do not necessarily create the specific causes to be born in the Sublime Realm of Shambhala.

Only those teachings that have a specific karmic connection to the Kalki kings or to the realm of Shambhala itself are capable of creating the necessary karmic propensities to project a rebirth into the Sublime Realm of Shambhala. Why is this important? It is important because such a rebirth provides the perfect conditions to achieve one's own and others' aims.

I believe that it is important to always be realistic in one's thinking and, realistically speaking, the amount of merit required to abide in the ultimate and pure manifestations of Shambhala is extraordinarily high. This means that only a tiny fraction of people will realistically have the conditions to achieve those aims within the span of a single human life in this world. Similarly, by striving only for the aspects of Shambhala, we fall short of our ultimate goals and will continue to be dominated by our karma. Sure, our samsara will be nicer, but it won't last. Sooner or later, our positive karma will run out and we will be right back where we started.

In this context, then, the most plausible and the most beneficial short-term goal for the widest number of people is to strive to achieve rebirth in the Sublime Realm of Shambhala. If you can do that, then you will be free from the suffering of cyclic existence while also having all of the conditions you need to complete the path and achieve the Ultimate Shambhala within the span of a single human life. This means that those teachings with specific karmic

connections to this sublime realm are particularly precious among all other teachings.

The Unique Advantages of Practicing Kalachakra

Using these qualities as our selection criteria, we are now able to develop insight into why the Kalachakra teachings were able to transform Shambhala in the way they did and also why the Kalachakra will play a crucial role in the transformation of our world as well.

First, the main practice of the *Kalachakra Tantra* is the profound path of vajra yoga. This is a direct path that is designed to rapidly establish the experience of buddha nature. Through six sets of nonconceptual practices, the vajra yogas refine that experience and bring forth the limitless qualities of the mind. Since this is its main focus, all of the practices are focused on transcending the conceptual mind so that nonconceptual primordial wisdom can be attained.

Second, the Kalachakra path is a complete path that is capable of guiding a student from the very beginning of how to nurture their basic love and compassion all the way up to perfect and complete manifestation of buddhahood. Grounded in its profound understanding of the nature of reality, this path guides practitioners from day one on how to manifest the qualities of buddha nature in their experience.

Third, the *Kalachakra Tantra* is the most extensive teaching on the subject of primordial wisdom. Within a single encyclopedic volume, the Buddha reveals the formation of our cosmos, the dependent arising of humans within this environment, the sciences to work skillfully with these phenomena and, most importantly, how to identify and experience the underlying purity that is the substrate to all experience.

The sheer vastness of this teaching creates a universal theory of everything, providing keen insight into the interconnections between different dimensions of reality. The main effect of this expansiveness

is that it allows Kalachakra to integrate a wide variety of teachings into a cohesive whole. This syncretic quality embraces a rich diversity of individual dispositions and allows the principles of Kalachakra to be applied to a wide variety of contexts.

Fourth, the Kalachakra teachings are extremely clear. While the Buddha taught the vajra yogas in multiple texts, the most clear and detailed presentation is found in the *Kalachakra Tantra*. When compared to other tantras, there is a minimal use of symbolic language, and when there is, it is often accompanied by extensive explanations that reveal its underlying intention. A great portion of the *Kalachakra Tantra* is also dedicated to the clearing away of misconceptions that arose even at the time of the Buddha. This theme is then carried forward into the commentarial tradition that emphasizes the use of clear and direct language. All of this means that it is possible to find details in the *Kalachakra Tantra* that are not found in any other source. This makes it and its commentary truly unique.

Fifth, the *Kalachakra Tantra* is the only unsurpassed tantra that makes its connection to Shambhala explicit. Through the histories included in its extensive commentary and the prophecies made by the Buddha himself, it becomes clear that the two are inseparably linked. Therefore, for every moment that you spend practicing Kalachakra, you are simultaneously cultivating your connection with this sublime realm.

What this means is that even if your immediate goal right now is simply to live a more meaningful and peaceful life, your practice of Kalachakra will still create propensities for you to be born at the time of the golden age and also to eventually be born in the Sublime Realm of Shambhala. All of these benefits come automatically through the power of the karmic connection between Shambhala and Kalachakra.

In this way and for these reasons, from within the teachings of the Dzokden Dharma, the primary teachings that we need to rely on are the teachings of Kalachakra. This should be our main practice. However, in order to get ourselves to the point where we can do that,

we will need to rely on all of the other teachings as our preliminary methods. Which specific teachings we rely on will depend on our specific karmic dispositions.

The Need to Rely on the Jonang Tradition

Having clearly distinguished between what is primary and what is secondary, we are then faced with the question: "Where do I find the Kalachakra teachings?" To answer this, we need to understand a bit about the history of Kalachakra in this world. We've already discussed how the teachings took root and were established in Shambhala, but how exactly did they make their way into our coarse realm of experience? And how were they preserved up to this day?

While a much more detailed history can be found in the appendices, for now, it is sufficient to know that the Kalachakra entered our realm around the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth. The abridged tantra and its extensive commentary were introduced into Buddhist universities such as Nalanda and Odantapuri and, from there, spread throughout India.

At that time, Tibet was engaged in a period of revival in which many Tibetan translators were traveling to India to receive teachings and bring them back to Tibet. Since the famous universities were hubs of intensive study and practice, many translators were subsequently introduced to the Kalachakra. From these translations, there arose seventeen different practice lineages with their corresponding textual traditions. The main differences between these systems of practice were primarily based on the distinct collections of pith instructions that had been given to each translator.

In general, this influx of new translations triggered a resurgence of Tibetan Buddhism and gave rise to various new traditions such as the Kadam, Sakya, and Kagyu. These three joined the Nyingma who had been established when Buddhism was first introduced into Tibet. While there were clear distinctions between the lineages that

each group emphasized, the traditions were very nonsectarian in nature and there was a great degree of cross-pollination of ideas and practices between the groups.

As these traditions were taking shape, the textual transmission of Kalachakra was universally embraced by all traditions. However, the actual practice of Kalachakra was held as a whispered lineage for many generations. This meant that the pith instructions were reserved for a very few select practitioners who were practicing under the direct guidance of an accomplished Kalachakra master.

By the thirteenth century, as the Tibetan practitioners matured in their Dharma practice, the restrictions on the Kalachakra teachings were loosened and the practices were taught more openly. At this time, one Sakya monk by the name of Thukje Tsondru became a specialist in Kalachakra by gathering together all of the pith instructions of the seventeen lineages. After actualizing these teachings in his own experience, he became a renowned mahasiddha. Students from all over the country traveled to his hermitage in Jomonang Valley to meditate with him. After some time, this community of dedicated Kalachakra practitioners became known as the Jonangpas.

Through the blessings of the Kalachakra teachings, hundreds of practitioners achieved high levels of realization at the Jonang Mountain Hermitage. The incredible efficiency and power of their practitioners inspired many great masters to travel there to receive instruction. One master in particular was the abbot of Sakya Monastery, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen.

During his time with the Sakya, Dolpopa had studied the teachings of both sutra and tantra extensively. He was referred to as being omniscient because there was not a single aspect of the teachings that he did not know. He was an extraordinarily respected and erudite master. Therefore, it is a testament to the power of the Jonang Dharma that such a teacher would be so humbled by witnessing the level of realization achieved by the Jonang yogis.

Under the expert guidance of his Jonang masters, Dolpopa was able to achieve an incredible degree of realization within a matter of

just four years. On the basis of his direct experience of buddha nature, he was able to see the underlying intention behind all of the Buddha's teachings and saw that they were completely consistent and without contradiction. Through his leadership, a unified system of sutra and tantra was established and the Jonang transformed from being a community of Kalachakra practitioners into being a distinct tradition with a unique philosophical view and practice lineage.

At its root, the textual tradition of the Jonang is synonymous with the Dzokden Dharma. They rely primarily on the teachings of the Buddha, those of his regent Maitreya, the three bodhisattva commentaries of Shambhala, the teachings of the two supreme ones of Nagarjuna and Asanga, and those of the six ornaments such as Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, and so forth. For their practices, they rely on the unbroken lineage of pith instructions that has been passed down to them through the chain of Shambhalan, Indian, and Tibetan mahasiddhas.

Due to the unique characteristics of the Kalachakra teachings, the Jonang have always been rooted in an unbiased approach to Dharma practice. Their masters have often held lineages from multiple streams of teachings and were highly respected in various traditions. The best example of this is the incomparable nonsectarian master Jetsun Taranatha. Looking at the forty-five volumes of his collected works, it becomes clear that there was not a single system of practice in Tibet that Taranatha was not aware of and proficient in. Due to his incredible efforts, an ocean of many rare and precious teachings has been preserved to this day.

The combination of these two qualities—being experts in the complete system of practice of the *Kalachakra Tantra* and their openness to all teachings—has meant that all existing systems of Kalachakra practice, regardless of the tradition, have at some point needed to rely on the Jonang. This makes the Jonang the primary lineage holder of the Dzokden Dharma.

For this reason, as we develop our aspiration to practice the Kalachakra so that we can actualize the manifestation of Shambhala,

it is vital that we make connections with qualified teachers from this Jonang tradition. Whether or not you personally identify yourself as a Jonangpa is not important. What is important is for you to gain access to the extraordinary treasures that they have preserved for more than a thousand years.

This is what I personally have done. Originally, I received most of my training in the Nyingma tradition. At a certain point, I felt the need to practice Kalachakra. That led me to seek out qualified masters of Kalachakra. This led me to the Jonang. After receiving the blessings of their guidance, I was then able to develop significantly more clarity about the teachings in other traditions. This allowed me to supplement my practice by working with the Geluk, Kagyu, and Sakya.

While this is just one example from my own experience, I believe the same principles can apply to everyone. First, we need to prepare ourselves, then we need to focus on Kalachakra, and, finally, we need to refine our practice using whatever methods we can from the vast repository of wisdom found in this world.

How the Jonang Practice Kalachakra

If one is not careful, it is possible to misinterpret what I am writing and think that I am trying to convert everyone to Buddhism and, specifically, to say that they must be card-carrying members of the Jonang tradition and no others. This is not my intention. What I encourage you to do is to become familiar with the Jonang teachings because they are so vitally important for the manifestation of Shambhala. Learn from them. Understand how they work with reality and then connect that wisdom with your own experience. Whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or whatever, there are great benefits to contemplating the teachings of Kalachakra.

To help illustrate how to do this, I would now like to provide a short summary of how the path is traditionally practiced within the Jonang tradition. Then, in the following chapter, I will explore how

to apply these same practices to your daily life in a more flexible and inclusive way.

The Outer Preliminaries

The first level of the path is spent understanding the interdependent nature of our present reality. Practitioners learn about cause and effect, the nature of suffering, the preciousness of our present conditions, and the nature of impermanence. The main practices at this level teach us how to be decent human beings through the fundamental ethic of nonviolence.

The next phase is to establish confidence in the Dzokden Dharma by learning to clearly distinguish the unique characteristics of these teachings and also how they have been preserved within the lineage of realized masters. This helps to remove doubts in the mind of practitioners and to give them the inspiration they need to move forward along the path.

The Inner Preliminaries

Following this, practitioners are introduced to practices that are designed to expand the heart of love and compassion. They are taught to identify the effects of self-cherishing and self-grasping and then how to overcome these destructive states of mind. This allows them to expand their awareness and shift their orientation to a more altruistic perspective.

Once an unbiased motivation has been established, the training turns to purifying the mind and accumulating the mental fortitude needed to realize one's buddha nature. This work is about letting go of one's psychological baggage and gathering energy through the practice of virtuous activities. It is a fundamental step in creating the conditions for the experience of buddha nature to arise. When practiced correctly, practitioners achieve an extraordinary degree of mental balance and stability, which allows them to be courageous in the face of obstacles and steady in their practice.

The next phase is to develop one's capacity to surrender one's ego and allow oneself to sincerely follow the instructions of a teacher. This step is virtually impossible for those who have not already developed the stability through the previous practices. However, it is absolutely fundamental if the practitioner is going to overcome their subtlest obscurations. Without the guidance of a master acting as a mirror, it is extremely difficult to see what is holding us back.

The Unique Preliminaries

When a ground of devotion is firmly established, the Kalachakra teachings can be introduced. First, one establishes pure perception through working with the visualization of deities and the recitation of mantras. These are related to what is known as the Kalachakra generation stage. The overall effect of these practices is to refine the quality of mind and help us release our grasping on to appearances.

On the basis of this training, practitioners then abandon all conceptual practices and focus their efforts on establishing single-pointed concentration. Through this practice, a nonconceptual mind is established and the practitioner becomes ready to begin the main practice of the six vajra yogas.

The Main Practice

The six vajra yogas are a sequence of yogic practices that are specifically designed to establish direct perception of buddha nature and then to integrate all experience into that realization. The result of this process is perfect and complete enlightenment. When practiced authentically and with all of the preliminaries in place, it can produce enlightenment within a matter of just a few years.

The vajra yoga path relies heavily on the understanding that buddha nature is primordially pure and, therefore, the only reason we do not experience it now is due to the obscurations in our minds. Those obscurations are the coarse and subtle movements of conceptual, dualistic consciousness. If we can stop those movements

and their karmic propensities completely, then we create the conditions for infinite enlightened qualities to arise. This is the view that is taught in the *Kalachakra Tantra*.

What distinguishes these teachings from those of other traditions is that this path starts from the realization of nonconceptual primordial wisdom. In the first yoga of individual withdrawal, this extraordinary mind is established and then in the second, concentration, it is mastered. The result of starting in this way is that all of the subsequent vajra yogas are performed within that mind of yogic direct perception. This allows for the progressive refinement of the subtlest obscurations through purely nonconceptual methods.

Specifically, in the third yoga of life-force control, practitioners refine the movements of subtle energy, giving rise to the inner fire of primordial wisdom. Then, in the fourth, retention, they refine their experience of the subtle essences distributed throughout the body, which gives rise to great bliss. In the fifth, the yoga of recollection, the experience of bliss is refined even further until it gives rise to a completely immutable awareness of infinite bliss that unifies all experience nondualistically. Then, on the basis of abiding in that state, the sixth yoga of absorption removes all traces of karma, thus allowing perfect enlightenment to manifest completely.

The Advantages of Practicing in This Way

For those with strong karmic connections to this lineage, there are a number of important benefits that come from practicing in this traditional way. First, the outer and inner preliminary practices have been proven over the course of thousands of years to be highly effective methods for rapidly establishing the conditions needed to practice Kalachakra. This reliability means that you can have the confidence that you will be able to achieve your goal in an efficient way.

Second, by practicing within the blessings of the lineage, you create the conditions to be born in a time when an enlightened

society manifests in this world. Whether your practice is merely attending a Kalachakra empowerment, studying the life stories of the Kalachakra masters, or meditating on the Kalachakra preliminary practices, the more practice you do, the stronger your connection to Shambhala will become. The stronger the connection, the greater the certainty of experiencing the result of the golden age.

Third, by focusing on the rich materials found within the tradition, you will become very familiar with the sublime vision of Shambhala. This familiarity will act as a powerful condition to shape your experience of the transitional period and draw you toward Shambhala. Similarly, by practicing the Kalachakra completion stage, you will gain greater familiarity with the subtle mind. This familiarity will prevent you from taking a gross rebirth and will naturally allow the Sublime Shambhala to manifest.

Fourth, by achieving some level of mastery over the initial phases of the completion stage, you will develop sufficient awareness to allow you to take full advantage of the death process and to achieve the Pure Realm or the Ultimate Realm of Shambhala. If you combine this awareness with a strong familiarity with the death process itself, you will be more likely to achieve one of these levels of natural realization. How successful you are will depend on the degree of mastery you have with empty forms and immutable bliss.

Finally, if you completely dedicate your life to the practice of this path and attain mastery of all six yogas in the completion stage, you will achieve the ultimate realization of the definitive meaning of Shambhala within this very lifetime. Through fully perfecting the unity of empty form and immutable bliss, you will completely transcend the winds of your karma, thereby unveiling your sacred truth and manifesting the perfection of genuine peace and harmony.

7

Experiencing Shambhala in Your Life

While the traditional sequence of practice is the most well-established form of practicing Kalachakra, it is not the only way. If we can understand the essence of each practice, then it becomes possible to identify the underlying principles behind them and thus apply these principles to a wider variety of contexts.

Therefore, in order to help get you started, this chapter presents three ways that you can work with Kalachakra as a method to manifest different aspects of Shambhala. Each approach represents a different scope of activity corresponding to where you, as an individual, currently have your attention focused. Always remember these categories are not meant to limit you to a single option. They are more like a dynamic set of tools that can be used to take advantage of the many opportunities presented in your personal experience. As your context shifts, so too will your focus. If you are skillful, you will be able to maximize each moment, deriving the most benefit for yourself and those around you.

Breaking Down Barriers to Realizing Shambhala

As we discussed earlier in this book, deep down we are all driven by a common desire to experience happiness and to be free from

suffering. This most basic of motivations is behind each and every one of our actions, shaping our experience from moment to moment. This desire is also what binds us as individuals to everyone and everything in our world, connecting us in an infinite web of interdependence. This is the reality of our day-to-day experience, and it is at this level that we can start to cultivate greater peace and harmony in our lives.

The Kalachakra teaches us that our very nature is one of unconditional love and compassion. To experience true peace and harmony, we must remove that which blocks our true nature from manifesting. No matter where you live or what you believe, we all have the potential to experience this wonderful reality. So, what stands in our way?

The simple answer is bias. Bias is a result of grasping on to reality as being a specific way and then projecting our own value judgment on to what we perceive. We compartmentalize and draw boxes around everything in our personal realm of experience—holding tightly to some aspects while rejecting everything else. This way of relating to the world distorts reality and isolates us from our true nature, setting us up for the inevitable experience of suffering. Instead of strengthening our connection to each other, bias works to push us apart.

For this reason, to begin experiencing Shambhala in your life you will need to focus on removing bias as much as possible. This does not mean you have to live a life without preferences or judgments of any kind. It simply means that you should learn to discriminate from within the full spectrum of your experience and then use wisdom to guide your interactions with the world. Rather than limiting your view to a small fixed reality, you can appreciate the many possibilities in a given situation and learn how to make use of them whenever appropriate. To be free of bias is another way of saying to be free from limitations.

The Eight Forms of Bias

The question then arises: “In what ways do we limit our experience?” To answer this, it can be helpful to focus on eight general categories representing the main types of bias that exist in our world.

Gender (Male/Female)

From the moment we are born, our bodies develop in different ways and we come to take on the shape of a particular gender. Depending on the culture we live in, we may then find ourselves cast into specific roles based on expectations of how a man or woman should behave. This type of bias can limit the spectrum of qualities an individual identifies with and, therefore, limit the expression of their potential. While our physical form may indeed be different, our minds are not limited to one or the other. We all have the same capacity to develop a dynamic balance of qualities that allows us to connect with each other in profound ways.

Race (Same/Different)

Based on karmic conditioning and the genes activated during early development, a person can manifest a wide range of physical features and psychological traits. When we develop strong grasping on to the similarities or differences between ourselves and others, the resulting bias can turn into racial discrimination. By isolating ourselves into one group versus another, we cut our connection with the people who share our world. One alternative is to celebrate not only what unites us but what makes us unique. Working with diversity within our community can help us foster a mutual respect that is the foundation for understanding and tolerance.

Age (Young/Old)

After birth, we inevitably start the process of death. Throughout our lives, we pass through a number of stages in our development. It is common for some people to grasp on to a single age group as being optimum and, on this basis, develop the desire to remain in that state

for as long as possible. An effect of this type of bias is for our mind to become stuck in the past or in the future. Rather than living in the present, we end up living in a fantasy world that doesn't exist. The more disconnected we become from our reality, the more difficult it is to experience any sense of peace and contentment. Instead, we can recognize the unique opportunities that each phase of life has to offer. With greater awareness of the present, we can take advantage of those specific conditions to bring meaning and purpose into our activities.

Location (Near/Far)

For most of our lives, we are generally fixed to a specific place and time. Every day, we interact with a variety of people, some more than others. Many people become attached to those with whom they share the greatest proximity. Just consider the closeness you feel toward your family and friends versus what you feel for strangers. This sort of bias tends to create a tunnel vision that narrows our focus to only those in our immediate experience. If we can dissolve this bias, it becomes possible for our actions to incorporate a much broader scope. We stop seeing ourselves and our dear ones in isolation and begin to consider our part in a much larger context. So, while we may still act locally, we can also think globally.

Culture (Familiar/New)

As we grow up, everyone around us generally behaves in a similar way. What we refer to as "culture" is just a form of very strong habituation to certain patterns of behavior. When we become attached to our own culture, we cultivate a bias that sees the familiar as more important than the new. Too much focus on doing what is familiar will often lead to stagnation and atrophy, while too much focus on the new can lead to frantic instability. For this reason, a greater balance can be achieved by developing awareness of one's own traditions while cultivating curiosity about other approaches. In

this way, we are able to steadily progress as a society while still preserving its wisdom.

Knowledge (Experiential/Conceptual)

One of our greatest qualities as human beings is our ability to use abstract concepts to describe our experience. While these concepts can help us to develop knowledge about many types of hidden phenomena, if we become attached to them, we often forget about experiencing life. This type of bias locks us into a single way of knowing and limits our capacity to experience deeper and more profound states of being. When used skillfully, however, concepts can help to direct our attention to different aspects of reality, providing us with an opportunity to experience how reality exists.

Belief (Singular/Plural)

Many people find comfort and safety when they are surrounded by others who share similar ways of viewing the world. Unfortunately, it is very easy for us to cling to our views as being superior and to distance ourselves from those who think differently. By failing to recognize the benefits that arise from a diversity of views, we become locked into a narrow view of reality once again. If we learn to work with our own system within the context of a plurality of systems, it prevents us from becoming bogged down in dogma and allows us to learn from the wisdom that others have to offer.

Class (Low/High)

Inequalities within social groups are another major condition for the creation of bias. When some members within a group have more of certain qualities, resources, or privileges, they can develop a sense of superiority over those who do not. The more these class distinctions are reinforced, the more the gap widens and people lose the capacity to relate to each other. To overcome this form of bias, it is very important to cultivate a sense of humility and gratitude for the

benefits we each receive from the actions performed by others. When we comprehend that we are all interconnected and depend on each other in so many ways, we can develop greater appreciation for those around us and naturally strengthen our connections.

While we may be able to identify many more types of bias, these eight provide a very simple framework that we can apply to our day-to-day lives. By developing a greater awareness and understanding of these forms of bias, we can take a significant step toward realizing peace in our own life and greater harmony in our relationship with others.

How Kalachakra Specifically Removes Bias

At the root of every bias is a misconception that leads us to grasp on to some form of fabricated separation. For instance, if we grasp on to our skin color or the shape of our nose as being superior to someone else's, there is an assumption that these characteristics have some quality that makes them inherently better. If we deeply investigate this idea, we find that such bias is completely unfounded and not in accordance with reality. As it is dependent on ignorance, bias can be removed through developing wisdom. This premise is the primary focus of Kalachakra.

At this basic level, you do not need to concern yourself with the definitive nature of reality; instead, you can start by establishing just enough wisdom to prevent you from creating the above forms of bias. By doing this, you clear away the primary obstacles that prevent qualities of love and compassion from arising more fully in your experience. When love and compassion begin to truly blossom, you will have created a solid foundation for probing deeper into the nature of your experience.

To this end, the Kalachakra path starts with what is known as the external Kalachakra. This is simply a label to refer to the realm of your ordinary, day-to-day experience. You can learn how to relate to this realm through developing mental stability, discriminating wisdom, and an unbiased attitude. Regarding mental stability,

everything we experience arises in dependence on the state of our minds. Therefore, in order to explore how this relationship works, you will first need to stabilize your mind through meditation. By cultivating the qualities of a relaxed, still, and vivid mind, you can focus much more effectively on the different facets of your experience. This neutral foundation of stability is the perfect starting point for then developing greater insight.

As for discriminating wisdom, bias arises when the mind fixates on appearances and infuses them with the notion that they are good, bad, or neutral. To understand why this happens, you need to understand the way karmic conditioning shapes your experience. When you comprehend the basic principles of karma, it is then possible to consider the implications of that understanding. As you begin to see the full breadth of your potential experiences, you gain a greater perspective on what is truly important in life. The aim here is not to amass knowledge for knowledge's sake; the purpose is to develop a clear understanding of reality that allows you to make choices that will produce the results you desire.

Finally, with regards to an unbiased attitude, the practice of meditation and the discriminating wisdom that understands cause and effect provide the necessary foundation for actively seeking out strategies to clear away bias and connect with your inner nature. The easiest way to do this is through the practice of a spiritual path. In order to avoid your path becoming a foundation for more bias, it is important to enter into this process with the right attitude. It is helpful to cultivate the four qualities of tolerance, receptivity, curiosity, and flexibility. These provide the basis for an unbiased attitude that will ensure you receive the maximum benefit from whichever path you decide to follow.

Because the external Kalachakra is primarily focused on ordinary experience, developing mastery over it will allow you to live a more meaningful life conducive to the experience of genuine happiness—a life well lived with few regrets. For some this may be enough, but for others it will be a doorway to an experience of even greater potential —a first step on a much larger journey of self-discovery.

Strengthening Your Connection to Shambhala

One aspect that makes humans particularly unique is our great capacity to envision future events. Based on our hopes for the future, we often perform actions now to ensure a desirable outcome later. For example, consider how much time we spend getting an education to prepare us for some future job. Consider the investments we make to save for our retirement or the insurance we buy to ensure we are supported if hardship arises. It seems we are always working to shape conditions to manifest some desired future.

But how far ahead are we looking? While some may plan decades in advance, others simply live day to day. A short-term perspective can often mean there is not enough time to adapt to changing conditions, and this automatically creates limitations for what is possible. For those with a more long-term perspective, a greater panorama of events can be developed. This view helps us to make wiser choices regarding our potential courses of action.

Now, consider the implications of having a mindstream with no beginning and no end. When faced with the infinite continuity of our own existence, planning for just a single lifetime can seem extremely shortsighted. Like a flash of lightning, this life will be over, and we will soon find ourselves propelled into a new life with a new set of conditions. In the blink of an eye, everything that seemed so important will be lost forever and the only thing left will be our karmic propensities.

For this reason, the Kalachakra teachings urge us to go beyond the superficial layer of our ordinary experience. Instead of getting lost in the endless busyness of worldly existence, we can focus our energy inward and actively develop the karmic propensities that ensure our future lives are filled with happiness and not with suffering. This is a long-term investment that is guaranteed to make your life truly meaningful and bring more than just short-term benefit for a handful of people.

A powerful way of doing this is to skillfully use karmic connections to join your karmic networks to the peace and harmony you desire.

Through the practice of Kalachakra, you strengthen your connection to the principles of Shambhala and create the causes to experience greater peace and harmony both now and in the future. How much of Shambhala manifests is only limited by the effort you make to cultivate its causes.

While attending a Kalachakra empowerment is a wonderful way to make a strong connection with Shambhala in your mind, it is still limited by its duration. For a few very intense days, you participate in what is hopefully a memorable and inspiring event, but when it is over, you have to return home to your regular life. Soon, the few virtuous seeds you sowed will become buried beneath a mountain of worldly habits and confusion, and the positive influence of the experience will most likely recede into the background.

By refreshing your connection with Shambhala more often, you can begin to tip the balance of your own karmic propensities and make Shambhala a more dominant influence in your life. Ideally, this means touching base at least once a day with the qualities of love and compassion that support the experience of greater peace and harmony.

Preparing the Mind for Realization

In all honesty, this type of work takes considerable time and effort. The longer it takes, the more likely we are to fall back into old habits. For this reason, developing patience and determination is essential for overcoming the many obstacles we will face during this process.

The way the Kalachakra system does this is through working with what is known as the internal Kalachakra—the subjective experience of coarse consciousness. Through specifically working with the qualities of the mind at this level, we can create the necessary conditions to penetrate deeper into subtler levels of experience. The practices at this stage are focused on developing faith, an altruistic motivation, and determination.

Faith is the precursor to all action. You will never do anything if you don't believe it will help you achieve what you want. This is why

it is so important to spend time cultivating awareness of the reasons for relying on one path over another. In Kalachakra, faith must be grounded in reason. Only with reason can you develop the unwavering confidence that what you are doing is taking you in the right direction. Without this confidence, your practice will be riddled with doubt and your progress will be very slow.

As for altruistic motivation, when setting out on a long journey, it is helpful to know where you are going and why. Without a good sense of direction, it is easy to become lost and sidetracked. Knowing why you are doing something also helps you to overcome the many obstacles that will undoubtedly arise along the way. Since the root of peace and harmony is unconditional love and compassion, significant time needs to be spent developing the broadest, most meaningful motivation possible—the mind of enlightenment known as *bodhichitta*. Only this motivation is completely free from bias and can therefore carry you to the definitive meaning of your own buddha nature.

Finally, determination is important, because for countless lifetimes our minds have been deeply habituated to experiencing the world through the lens of ignorance. By relying on a spiritual path, we are essentially trying to reverse this habituation by replacing ignorance with wisdom. This is like swimming against the current of a raging river. If your mind is not strong enough, the current will simply carry you away and leave you gasping for air. You, therefore, need to be skillful. Through engaging in the internal preliminaries[*] of the Kalachakra path, it becomes possible to clear away the obstacles to your spiritual development and reinforce your habituation to virtuous deeds. When used properly, these practices give you the strength you need to get the job done.

When you start out on the path, your true nature is hidden from you—like the sun behind the clouds. By undertaking spiritual practice, you can clear away some of those clouds, giving the rays of sunlight a chance to shine through. How much of the sun you see will depend on how many clouds there are and how many you have

cleared away. Working with the internal Kalachakra provides the means to unveil this underlying truth of your experience.

For some this process may take the rest of their lives, while for others it can happen much more quickly. It all depends on the karmic conditions that are present in a person's mind and how much determination they bring to the task. If you engage in these practices sporadically, then you will progress at a very slow rate; however, if you dedicate yourself more intensively, you will progress much faster.

Cutting Through to the Nature of Mind

Whether slow or fast, the aim of practice at this stage is to ultimately catch a glimpse of your own enlightened nature. This fleeting experience can provide you with a working basis for developing greater familiarity. Once you know what to look for, you are then able to access a wealth of powerful and profound methods for rapidly dispelling all of the remaining obscurations from your mind. It is this experience that is the real purpose behind the Kalachakra empowerment. In a way, we can say it is an opportunity for the vajra master to introduce a ripened student to the subtle layers of their own mind. The strength of this experience will depend directly on the amount of prior preparation you have made.

After you have been properly introduced, you are then ready to begin work with the enlightened Kalachakra. In the beginning, this label refers to the subtle experience of your dualistic consciousness. While your aim is to completely transcend this form of consciousness, you will need to train your mind in order to purify the subtle habitual tendencies that mask your ultimate nature. This is done by developing three main qualities: pure perception, nonconceptual awareness, and continuity of experience.

As for the first, pure perception, one of the main reasons that people are unable to experience reality directly is because they are constantly projecting a distorted view of how it actually exists. This ordinary perception leads you to relate with the world in a very fixed

way that essentially masks you from your true potential. In order to dissolve this deeply ingrained habit, you will need to replace your present impure view with a conceptual model that is in accordance with reality. This pure view can then become a valid basis for experiencing reality as it is. Because this practice is working with a subtle layer of concepts, it is still only provisional in nature. That being said, until such time as you are able to completely transcend all conceptual projections, this pure view will help you avoid falling back into your old habits.

Regarding the second, nonconceptual awareness, as long as the mind is operating from the perspective of a dualistic consciousness, it will be limited to an indirect experience of reality. In order to manifest a direct experience of the definitive meaning, it is therefore necessary to first stop the proliferation of all concepts. In Kalachakra, this is done through engaging in a very efficient form of meditation specifically designed to cut through conceptual grasping. The benefit of engaging in this practice is that it provides you with an exceptional degree of single-pointed concentration that can then be used to work with very subtle layers of the mind.

The third quality is continuity of experience. In the beginning, pure perception and nonconceptual awareness are usually developed in reliance on formal meditation practices. While these techniques provide a controlled method for producing the desired states of mind, it is not usually possible for the practitioner to remain in formal meditation forever. Since the aim is to abide in a state of perpetual realization, it becomes necessary to learn how to skillfully integrate your meditative experience with the periods between practice sessions. Through reliance on the profound pith instructions of many great yogis, you can learn how to use all types of experience as supports for releasing your grasping on to ordinary appearances.

Whether your focus is on the internal or the enlightened level of Kalachakra will depend on where you are in your own spiritual development. No matter which practices you engage in within the context of the Kalachakra path, you are not only laying down virtuous propensities but also strengthening your connection to

Shambhala through the power of the lineage. This means that each action creates powerful causes for you to experience different aspects of Shambhala. If you practice with great determination, it is definitely possible to achieve a fortunate rebirth in the Sublime Realm of Shambhala or, at the very least, to be born during the golden age of this world.

Manifesting Shambhala in This Lifetime

For those who take the Kalachakra teachings to heart and strive diligently to integrate them into their lives, the natural qualities of love and compassion will become stronger and stronger. As they grow within our hearts, we may notice a shift occurring; whereas once a self-centered attitude dominated many of our decisions, the welfare of others becomes increasingly more important to us. If we nurture this other-centered view, we might find ourselves moved to take action.

Seeing the suffering and torment that sentient beings endure, we may ask ourselves: "What can I do for them?" We may start, for example, with simple activities of generosity such as volunteering our time or making donations. While this is a good start, it is still quite limited. Even though we may alleviate some gross levels of suffering, we are not helping to remove the causes of their suffering. To truly help others, we need to be like a very skilled physician who can provide an accurate diagnosis and then prescribe treatments that will remove the causes of that illness. In order to do this, it is necessary to know the minds of others and their karma. To fully know a person's karma, we must remove all cognitive limitations that prevent us from experiencing deeply hidden phenomena. In essence, we need to become omniscient.

Now, consider the scope of the activities you currently engage in. For most of us, we would be lucky to help a handful of people on any given day. Even if we were the wealthiest philanthropist in the world, we could only indirectly benefit a portion of the billions of humans

on this planet. What about all of the other humans or the animals? What about the beings we can't even see or the beings on other planets? When we start to consider the scope of sentient beings, it can become a little overwhelming. How, then, can we possibly help them all? As a human, it is simply not possible; we are too limited by space and time. To really bring benefit to all sentient beings, we need to be able to manifest in whatever form is required by those sentient beings. In order to do this, we need to abandon all clinging to an individual mindstream—in essence, we must remove all karmic conditioning.

A being free from all forms of limitation and who has actualized all virtuous qualities is known as an enlightened being, or a buddha. Only an enlightened being has both the wisdom and capacity to bring lasting benefit to all sentient beings. This is the ultimate aim of the Kalachakra path—to achieve full and complete enlightenment, not for one's own benefit but for the benefit of the limitless sentient beings currently trapped in the endless cycle of their destructive habits.

So how can we do this? If we focus on the external Kalachakra, we are likely to remove some bias from our life, but we will not get to the root of our problems; instead, we will drift on the surface, simply managing the symptoms. If we focus on practicing the internal Kalachakra alone, we are heading in the right direction by laying down the necessary propensities to achieve our aim, but we can't be sure how long it will take for those seeds to ripen. It may take anywhere from just a few lifetimes to a billion or more. What we do know is that the longer it takes, the more we and everyone else will continue to experience suffering.

For this reason, we need to take advantage of the brief window of opportunity available to us right now. We have attained a precious human birth and we have encountered the teachings of the profound path of vajra yoga. We have everything we need to achieve enlightenment within a single lifetime. Like a flash of lightning, this life will soon be gone, and the opportunity will have passed. By

focusing our energy on the practice of the enlightened Kalachakra, achieving buddhahood becomes a real possibility.

Previously, the enlightened Kalachakra referred specifically to working with the subtle layers of consciousness. Through those practices, it is possible to bring ourselves to the very edge of conventional reality. However, since subtle consciousness is limited to a dualistic mind that relates to appearances on the basis of subject and object, it is still not the definitive meaning.

Only through the nonconceptual practices of the six vajra yogas will the provisional meaning be abandoned and the ultimate nature of reality revealed. In this context, the enlightened Kalachakra refers to the experience of nonconceptual primordial wisdom. It is this very subtle level of experience that is capable of completely cutting the winds of your karma. This is achieved through the mastery of three qualities: empty form, great bliss, and the sublime unity of empty form and immutable bliss. As for the first, empty form, through the yogas of individual withdrawal and concentration, you focus on the direct perception of manifest emptiness. Having completely cut the conceptual mind, you learn to rest in a state that is free from all forms of grasping. Once you have developed familiarity with this experience, you then learn how to mix that experience with all types of perception, effectively seeing all appearances as empty forms. The second is great bliss. Here, the yogas of life-force control and retention focus on the refinement of your nonconceptual awareness through the steady intensification of bliss. As your mind releases the habit of grasping on to appearances, its blissful nature will naturally manifest. Then, through the skillful methods of working with your subtle energetic body, it becomes possible to amplify this experience so that your mind becomes increasingly subtler and more concentrated. The third is the sublime unity of empty form and immutable bliss. Finally, through the yoga of recollection you will refine your awareness into immutable bliss, which is the unchanging experience of sublime emptiness. Then, through the yoga of absorption, you will use the power of that realization to progressively

dissolve all karmic winds and thereby cut all forms of conditioned experience.

As with any spiritual practice, the vajra yogas develop over time. It takes tremendous dedication and perseverance to truly master each yoga. For this reason, it is essential to engage fully in all of the preliminary practices. Without the foundational qualities these practices produce, we cannot gather the necessary conditions to authentically practice the yogas, and, therefore, the realizations we seek will not arise.

On the other hand, if you diligently apply yourself to collecting all the conditions for realization, you can be guaranteed to gain immense benefit from these practices. Not only will you come to know your most sacred truth, but you will also gain mastery over your own mind and body, enabling you to die with full awareness. As your mind dissolves into the ultimate state of Shambhala, the death process will cease to hold any power over you; instead, it will become a powerful support for your attainment of enlightenment. At the very least, you can be sure to be born into the Sublime Realm of Shambhala where you can continue your practices and quickly achieve this ultimate goal.

Gathering the Conditions for Success

What I hope this chapter has demonstrated is that in whichever situation you may find yourself, there is always the possibility to develop greater peace and harmony in your life. Each and every one of us, without exception, undoubtedly has the capacity to manifest these qualities. It is just a matter of whether or not we take advantage of the opportunities to do so.

Sometimes, developing the aspiration to practice is simply not enough. It can, at times, feel like everyone and everything is conspiring against you, making it impossible for any real progress along the path to occur. When faced with this sort of resistance, it's easy to lose heart and give up, reverting back to familiar old habits.

For this reason, we need to generate conducive conditions that support our practice, no matter what level of motivation we are working with. Here are just a few suggestions for cultivating these conditions.

Teachers

Whenever we set out into uncharted territories, it is wise to have a qualified guide to show us the way. While the Kalachakra path provides us with an excellent map for how to achieve peace and harmony, a teacher who can show us how to most effectively walk that path is a necessity. Because each of our minds is unique, no two people will progress in exactly the same way. This is why it is important to develop a stable, long-term relationship with an authentic teacher who is capable of helping us to adjust course as obstacles arise.

Community

It is not easy to walk this path in isolation. One way to help you overcome the difficulties you will face is to surround yourself with people who share your aspirations and inspire you to be a better person. Finding the right spiritual community can be difficult, but it is definitely worth the effort. Just remember that you are not looking for people who will simply make you feel good; you should be looking for people who genuinely care about you and are willing to help you work through your problems. Often, this sort of family dynamic takes time to develop, and patience is required.

Environment

Another important condition is the actual environment in which you practice. Setting aside a specific space designated for spiritual practice can go a long way toward helping your mind transition away from ordinary thought patterns and move it into a more internal and contemplative mode. If this is not possible in your home, having a

place where you can go at least once a week is a good start. If you find you would like to engage in more intensive practice, you may want to seek out facilities where you can do short- or long-term retreats.

Time

By far, the most challenging thing for people living in a busy modern world is overcoming the belief that there is no time for spiritual practice. The reality is that you can always make time for the activities you believe are important. Unfortunately, all too often people place spiritual practice at the bottom of their list. If you really want to experience greater peace and harmony in your life, you will need to seriously analyze how you spend your energy.

In the end, you do the best that you can to make the most of the conditions you have. While we can all aspire for the "perfect" scenario, you cannot let your imperfect reality prevent you from developing your qualities. Instead, look at each moment as though it were an opportunity. If you are skillful, there is no situation that cannot be transformed into a support for practice.

SKIP NOTES

* The internal preliminaries are fivefold: (1) taking refuge in the Three Jewels, (2) generating bodhichitta, (3) Vajrasattva purification, (4) accumulating merit with mandala offerings, and (5) the practice of guru yoga.

8

Toward a Golden Age

I have no doubt that with a foundation of love and compassion supported by authentic wisdom traditions such as that of the *Kalachakra Tantra,* we all have the capacity to transform how we perceive our world and how we relate to those around us. We choose which qualities we value. We choose what activities we teach our children. We also choose where to place our attention. Transforming our world is not something that needs to be far away in the future; it can be our reality right now. It all depends on the choices we make.

Every day, we are faced with a wide variety of situations. Each moment brings the opportunity to make a choice, and we can choose to either act with wisdom or from ignorance. If we take a good hard look at our life, we will see which of the two currently dominates our decisions. Fortunately, it's not all black and white, and no matter how confused we may be at times, there is always the potential to act with wisdom.

In this context, ignorance is anything that distorts our perception of reality and, therefore, limits or prevents us from experiencing reality as it is. Wisdom, on the other hand, is anything that allows us to experience reality free of distortion and free from limitation. While ignorance is a support for suffering and conflict, wisdom is a support for peace and harmony. These two qualities are mutually exclusive; when one is present, the other is not. That being said,

there are many levels of ignorance and wisdom. While we may experience flashes of gross wisdom, there can still be an underlying level of subtle ignorance that dominates our perception.

As we saw in the previous chapter, through the practice of a spiritual path, it becomes possible to develop our wisdom regarding each level of our experience. In the Kalachakra system, we speak of three levels—external, internal, and enlightened. Each of these levels represents a distinct field of experience that, when used skillfully, is a ground for experiencing reality free from bias and ignorance. On the basis of this experience, we can make choices that lead not only to our own peace and harmony but also to that of others.

Understanding Cycles of Time

This process of transformation represents what, in the Kalachakra tradition, is called a cycle of time. In this context, a cycle of time refers to a period of personal evolution that occurs as the natural consequence of putting the teachings into practice. This cycle does not have a set duration—for some it will be long, while for others it will be short. How this cycle plays out will depend entirely on the conditions that are manifest at any given moment and how we make use of the opportunities they represent.

Even though we are each experiencing our own personal cycle of time, we are not alone. If we remember back to our discussion of karmic connections, we may recall how an enormous amount of our experience is shared with other sentient beings. Through our connections with these beings, we all form part of increasingly larger cycles of time. For instance, consider the evolution of a single family from generation to generation or the growth of a community from village to sprawling metropolis. Consider the evolution of nations as they grow from isolated kingdoms into massive empires. Each is a cycle of time—a continual process of change filled with endless periods of growth and decline.

When we develop an awareness of these different cycles, certain recurring patterns become apparent. While specific details of the stories may change, the basic structure of the narrative is repeated over and over again. The degree to which we perceive these patterns depends on the scope of our vision; the wider and more expansive our mind becomes, the bigger the picture we can comprehend.

Imagine how this universe must look to the omniscient mind of a buddha. Having completely removed all limitations, buddhas are no longer fixed to space and time. They are able to know all possible dimensions of experience simultaneously. From this infinitely vast view, they can observe cycles of time that describe not only the evolution of a single sentient being but of entire societies and even the universe itself.

According to the Kalachakra teachings given by the Buddha, the universe is composed of an infinite sea of overlapping karmic realms of experience. Due to the strength of the karmic connections created by the beings within those realms, it is possible to identify different groups based on the similarity of their experiences and the characteristics of their minds. In total, there are six main groups: hell beings, spirits, animals, humans, asuras, and gods. Since each of these realms is described extensively in my book *Unveiling Your Sacred Truth,* I will not go into detail here. For now, the realm we are most interested in is our present realm—the realm of humans.

As we have discussed earlier, not all human realms are the same. Depending on the karma of the individual, different realms of experience can exist with different degrees of subtlety. On one end of the spectrum, we have gross realms of experience such as the world we live in now; on the other end, there are subtle realms such as the Sublime Realm of Shambhala that are more dreamlike in nature. As different realms function at different frequencies of mind, a gross level of mind cannot experience the subtler realms; however, it is possible to “travel” between these realms by learning how to tune our mind to different levels of subtlety through the practice of meditation. This is the principle behind how many yogis are able to

visit Shambhala temporarily and meet with the enlightened beings that live there.

For many people, this description of the universe may be difficult to comprehend. To help us wrap our heads around these concepts, the Buddha often used terminology people were familiar with. For example, if we look at all the human realms, we can identify four main types: subtle human realms, gross human realms, human realms transitioning from gross to subtle, and human realms transitioning from subtle to gross. Since we are accustomed to thinking of the world in relation to space and time, the Buddha described these four types as four continents situated in each of the four cardinal directions. Between these continents are oceans, representing the space of the mind in which all these realms are arising.

It is essential to recognize here that when describing the vast potential of our experiential universe, there is no fixed way of representing its different features. Using skillful means, the Buddha communicated his ideas in a way that made use of the cultural context in which he was teaching. This allowed people of varying capacities to benefit from his teachings in different ways. For those who were capable of understanding the intent behind his teachings, these descriptions became powerful supports for working with the very nature of reality. For those who were not yet ready, they provided a useful representation, capable of inspiring the person to go beyond their fixed view of reality.

Within the context of Kalachakra, the Buddha could see that conditions within these four continents were not static. Just like everything else, they were in a constant state of change. When viewed from an expansive scale of time, the minds of the beings in these realms could be seen to periodically fluctuate between a predominance of either wisdom or ignorance. This change was primarily driven by the presence or absence of authentic wisdom teachings.

Over the course of a single cycle, beings in each continent experience four phases: completion, three parts, two parts, and

degeneration. During the phase of completion, the complete teachings of definitive meaning are widely available and practiced, leading to a dominance of wisdom; this can be referred to as a golden age. In time, however, the teachings begin to decline until they are virtually nonexistent. This process of steady degeneration is represented by the other three phases. If we divide each of these phases into a beginning, middle, and end, we arrive at twelve divisions. From this perspective, we can say that each continent consists of a main continent surrounded by two smaller continents, making twelve continents in total.

Within this cycle of time, the Buddha observed that all of the continents experience these four phases in a staggered fashion. When one continent experiences the phase of completion, the next finishes its cycle of degeneration. Then, when the teachings are almost completely gone, a great being from that neighboring continent manifests to rejuvenate or reintroduce the authentic teachings into that world. This marks the coming of a new golden age and the start of another cycle of four phases. This being is known as a wheel-turning king.

Here, we should distinguish between a wheel-turning king and a wheel-turning buddha such as Shakyamuni. While a wheel-turning buddha is responsible for introducing a brand-new cycle of teachings into our world, a wheel-turning king is a highly realized bodhisattva who is responsible for refreshing those teachings by periodically transferring them from one continent to the next. In a way, we can think of the wheel-turning king as the one who sustains the purity of the teachings.

For those familiar with Buddhist cosmology, it is worth mentioning that the particular cycle of time we are discussing is embedded within much larger cycles of time. We can speak of the cycle of time that governs the formation and disintegration of a world system or even the larger cycles that relate to the formation of a universe. There are also the cycles of time in which fully realized buddhas will manifest in the world. All of these cycles occur in parallel, so while we may be in one phase of one cycle, we can also be

in a different phase of another. We can see this principle in our own lives when we consider that within the cycle of birth and death, we can also experience the cycle of a romantic relationship or the cycle of being a parent and raising a child. As cycles of time are merely conceptual constructs, they do not limit each other in any way.

The Coming of the Next Wheel-Turning King

While understanding the different cycles of time on a cosmic scale can be helpful to identify very large patterns, they can at times feel quite removed from our present situation. We, therefore, need to return our focus to this world and the time in which we are currently living. Of the twelve continents mentioned above, we live in the southernmost continent that is traditionally referred to as Jambudvipa. This means our realm of experience is generally quite gross with a heavy fixation on physical reality.

At this level, we are specifically interested in the experiences of those living on the planet Earth, as it is here that the teachings of Kalachakra have manifested. It is also here that the Sublime Realm of Shambhala was formed through the practice of those teachings. For this reason, since we all share a karmic connection with this planet, we also share a connection to Kalachakra and Shambhala. The strength of that connection largely depends on our individual karmic propensities as well as other connections we have made over time. Regardless of how weak or strong the connections may be, as long as they exist, we have a basis from which to work.

How, then, does Shambhala relate to the cycle of a golden age? According to the Kalachakra, the wheel-turning king will come from a realm “adjacent” to our own, denoting the start of a golden age. This means that when our realm reaches the end of the last phase of the cycle, the teachings will be rejuvenated by a highly realized being from a realm where the teachings have not yet degenerated. This realm is adjacent in the sense that it shares a strong karmic connection with this world. For the people of this planet, that

adjacent realm is Shambhala. To understand how this process will take place, we can refer to the prophecies presented in the *Kalachakra Tantra* itself.

Misconceptions about the Kalachakra Prophecies

From the five chapters of the *Kalachakra Tantra*,[*1] the nature of reality is described as corresponding to three different levels: external, internal, and enlightened. Within the discussion of the external, the Buddha presents a detailed description of the universe from the perspective of Kalachakra and how that universe evolves over time. The text then goes on to provide a number of prophecies for how the next period of completion—the golden age—will emerge in the future. Due to the specific language used in the text and how it was translated by earlier Western translators, these prophecies have generated a great deal of confusion over the years. In order to clearly understand the true intent behind these passages, I will now focus on clarifying some of the key misconceptions that have arisen.

Anti-barbarian, Not Anti-Islam

The first major misconception is that the Kalachakra is in some way an adversary to the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This incredibly unfortunate error has arisen due to not having a deep enough understanding of the intent behind the Buddha's teachings. Due to the importance of developing clarity with regards to this issue, I would like to offer a detailed presentation of this particular passage as it is found in the *Kalachakra Tantra*:

> Ardo, Anogha, and Varahi are born in the asura family
> of nagas and endowed with darkness.
> There are also five others: Musa, Isa, Svetavastri,
> Madhumati, and Mathani who is the eighth. Like
> that, these eight are [the teachers of barbarians].

They are endowed with darkness. Clearly, in the city of
Bagada in the country of Makha, the seventh will
indeed be born.

In that one, the practices of the worldly asuras abide
with power and the form of the barbarian [dharma
abides] without mercy.

The first thing that we must understand is the context for this verse. In accordance with the explanation of Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen, this is one verse in a series of verses that identify the names, number, and birthplaces of the lineage holders for two types of teachings—the complete teachings of the Kalkis and the corrupted teachings of the barbarians. Of these three aspects, it is the third, regarding the birthplace, that seems to generate the most confusion.

In the previous verses, the Buddha identifies the wheel-turning kings who will be the lineage holders of the teachings of the Kalkis. He also identifies that they will be born in the realm of the gods and will be endowed with purity. However, Shambhala is not a god realm; it is a very subtle human realm. So, is this not a contradiction? As Dolpopa explains, in this context, being "born in the realm of gods" refers to the faculties of the disciples who will receive teachings from these teachers. It is basically saying that the teachers will arise in a place where the students are of the highest faculties and will be able to comprehend the complete teachings of definitive meaning. By saying that they are "endowed with purity," it is referring to abiding in bliss. This is another way of saying that those students will be ripe to use the skillful means of the nonconceptual path of vajra yoga.

After the wheel-turning kings, the Buddha identifies the series of kings endowed with a fraction of the teachings of definitive meaning. These teachers will be born in the realm of spirits, which means that their students will have middling faculties and will not be able to fully comprehend the definitive meaning. It is said that they will be "endowed with energy," which refers to being dominated by attachment. Attachment drives the propensities of conceptual

movements; therefore, these students will primarily grasp the definitive meaning conceptually.

Then, finally, we arrive at the verse in question in which the Buddha identifies the lineage of teachers where the barbarian dharma will arise and the birthplace or type of students that they will have. Here, there are eight teachers explicitly named. Ardo, Anogha, and Varahi are the first three. They appear to correspond to Adam, Noah, and Abraham—the shared forefathers of both the Jewish and Arab peoples. Then, there are Musa, Isa, and Svetavasti, which I interpret to correspond to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—the founders of the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Then we have two more: Madhumati and Mathani. These two are not so clearly identified and it is difficult to say who they refer to. In particular, Mathani likely refers to a future teacher who has not yet arisen in our world.

Here, the Buddha says that they are "born in the family of asuras." This passage was previously translated by Western scholars as the blanket statement: "they are demons." Because of this unfortunate choice, those who rely on this translation are led to believe that the Kalachakra sees Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as demonic and, therefore, something to be destroyed. This idea is directly contradictory to the very essence of the *Kalachakra Tantra,* which was taught solely to help sentient beings experience the definitive meaning of Shambhala and live in perfect peace and harmony. Clearly, we must remove this misconception if we are to approach the definitive meaning of the text.

When the Buddha taught that these teachers would be born into "the family of asuras," he was following the pattern established in the previous verses. In this context, the teachers arise in the context of students with lesser faculties who do not have the conditions to grasp the definitive meaning. The students are "endowed with darkness" because they are dominated by ignorance and afflicted states of mind. When someone is dominated by such ignorance, they make horrible decisions and find themselves in constant conflict. It is this ignorance that perpetuates the cycle of death and destruction. But

what is ignorance? It is nothing more than concepts—ideas that are introduced into the mind and then nurtured over time. While some ideas can lead us to greater peace, some lead us only to conflict.

When Manjushri Yashas gathered the Brahmin sages of Shambhala together and asked them to review their teachings, he was asking them to identify the ideas that led to conflict. In their case, it was the ideas of segregation and animal sacrifice that he highlighted to them as detrimental. He reminded them that those ideas were indistinguishable from "barbarian dharma." He did not say, "because these ideas exist, all of Hinduism is barbarian." A doctor does not kill a patient because only one area of the body has cancer. Instead, he attempts to remove only the cancer while leaving the healthy parts of the body intact.

Similarly, the Buddha is not teaching that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are categorically evil. Far from it. Instead, he is prophesying that as a result of a particular set of conditions that would arise at a particular time and place, the teachings of great sages such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad would be misinterpreted through the lens of ignorance, and cancerous ideas would subsequently be introduced—ideas such as legitimizing the slaughter of sentient beings who do not follow one's own literal interpretation of the scriptures. If these kinds of ideas are left unchecked, they will continue to grow and fester, breeding only hatred and division.

In this verse, the Buddha is very specific about where we should look for an example of the problem. He says, "in the city of Bagada in the country of Makha, the seventh will indeed be born." If we interpret Bagada to refer to Baghdad and Makha to refer to Mecca, then there appears to be some contradiction. Mecca is a city in the Arabian Peninsula. Baghdad is also a city in the country of Iraq. These are very distinct places. However, note that he says, "in the country of Mecca." I take this to mean "in the empire of Mecca," which means within the Muslim empire. The city of Baghdad was at one time the capital of the Muslim empire. This gives us a potential place and time in which the seventh teacher—Madhumati—may have

been born. Another interpretation could be that it is referring to the more general region of Iraq, which would coincide with the more recent arising of organizations such as the Islamic State. However, this is hard to know for certain. What is important here is that this person will introduce ideas that the Kalachakra refers to as "the barbarian dharma that abides without mercy." Further analysis would need to be made in order to specifically identify which ideas he was referring to and who this Madhumati might be.

Now, while the Buddha narrows his focus to a particular place and time in order to identify "barbarian dharma," he is not saying that this is the only place barbarian dharma arises. This verse is just an example. Throughout our history, we can see the manifestations of ignorance arising in all cultures. Barbarian dharma is characterized as extreme bias that breeds conflict, and, as you will see if you read the history of the Jonang, sectarianism was (and in many ways still is) a major problem within Tibetan Buddhism. Likewise, the minds that motivated the Christian Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the atrocities of the Nazis, the purges of Stalinist Russia, racism and bigotry in the United States, or the disastrous Cultural Revolution in China—all of these reveal the devastating effects the barbarian mind can have on our world.

From this perspective, we can hopefully now see that we all have the capacity to become barbarians—to be consumed by our bias and dominated by ignorance. If we are unaware of this negative potential, we run the risk of being overpowered by it. Therefore, it is each of our responsibilities to clearly identify who the enemy is. No matter what sentient beings may do, they are never the enemy. The enemy is the afflicted mind of ignorance and bias that dominates them. That is what the Kalachakra is trying to get us to focus on.

Strong Methods for Strong Afflictions

The next misconception is that through the use of violent and confrontational language, the Kalachakra is in some way promoting violence. Taken literally, it can seem that the Kalki king Raudra

Chakri will emerge from Shambhala and physically destroy everyone who stands in his way. There are even passages describing how to build war machines to devastate the defenses of one's enemy. How can we understand this seemingly militaristic and aggressive presentation?

The key point here is to recognize that this war will not only be fought in the external world—it will primarily be fought in the battlefields of our minds. As such, the use of metaphor is a powerful method to communicate the attitude needed to win this war. Consider what we are up against. Since beginningless time, we have been dominated by our habituation toward bias. These ignorant states of mind are constantly distorting our experience and conditioning us to conflict and suffering. Over time, these habits are reinforced within our communities and become entrenched in our societies.

How, then, do we overcome such an enemy? If we can confront this enemy early on, we may be able to employ peaceful measures. Through love and compassion, we can inspire others to change and hopefully bring about the results we seek. Unfortunately, this will only work for a time. As afflictions grow in strength, the antidote required also needs to become stronger. While love and compassion remain our motivation, our methods need to become more direct and powerful in nature. They must have the ability to cut deep down to the very root of our ignorance, to completely destroy the very basis of our afflictions.

This is why the Kalachakra spends so much time focusing on the absolute nature of reality—for only the knowledge of this nature is truly capable of eradicating our bias. Raudra Chakri is the representation of that realization. He is the wisdom that abides in the definitive meaning and, therefore, is the force that will ultimately win us the war against our afflictions.

While it may seem strange to use this type of language in relation to the cultivation of peace and harmony, this is largely due to the fact that our mind strongly associates war with worldly motivations such as greed and hatred. We oversimplify the concept and label it as bad.

The Buddha, however, recognized that just like a parent must discipline an unruly child, so must those who aspire for peace and harmony take action to prevent those dominated by ignorance and bias from harming themselves. Yes, there will be confrontation, but it does not come from hatred but rather from love and compassion.

We know this is the case because the *Kalachakra Tantra* also describes how those who had previously followed the barbarian dharma will then be introduced to the definitive meaning after they have been tamed by the wheel-turning king. It is clear that the coming war is not about destroying the other side and seizing control over the planet. It is about helping each other to recognize our mistakes and blazing a new path forward where we can all live in peace and harmony. For this reason, we all need to have the courage to face our ignorance head on and overcome it using whatever means are most skillful.

One Mind at a Time

The final misconception that I would like to address is that the golden age will arise as the result of a single event at a fixed point in time. One common notion is that in less than roughly four hundred years' time, there will be a great apocalyptic battle where the vast armies of Raudra Chakri will emerge from Shambhala to smite the barbarians, and the golden age will be born. This overly simplistic interpretation doesn't take into account the actual nature of the process.

The golden age will manifest as a result of the actions of each and every one of the people living in this world. This transformation will only occur when we as individuals are able to overcome our own afflictions through the power of working with the definitive meaning. For this reason, the battle between Raudra Chakri and the barbarians is a war that is raging as we speak.

Through engaging in authentic spiritual practice, we are strengthening the forces of wisdom to overpower the forces of ignorance. In time, our efforts will gain momentum and the enemy

will be on the run. Instead of ignorance and bias controlling our actions, we can make choices conducive to peace and harmony by engaging with the world from the perspective of wisdom.

Just like us, others, too, will go through a similar process, and with the right support, they will also overcome their afflictions. In this way, one mind at a time, the balance between ignorance and wisdom will shift, and our shared realm of experience will be transformed.

From this perspective, the arrival and duration of the golden age is not fixed simply because it was prophesied to come at a certain time. As the golden age depends on karmic causes and conditions, it is also dependent on our actions to create those causes. The key to ushering in this next phase of the cycle is to focus our minds on the definitive meaning. By making buddha nature our primary focus, we make ourselves suitable vessels for receiving the teachings of the vajra yoga path. Only when we become suitable students will the teacher manifest and introduce us to the teachings. If we focus our energy on achieving this result, it can come to fruition quickly. Conversely, if we continue to ignore the problem, it may take much longer. It is entirely in our hands.

Relying on the Meaning, Not the Words

By relying on the meaning of the prophecies and not merely on the words, we come to recognize the underlying wisdom being presented here. Rather than locking our views into a single place and time with extreme notions of good versus evil, we can learn to see that the pattern of a golden age is in fact beyond time and, therefore, can be applied within any number of different contexts. In this way, the Kalachakra prophecies become a powerful blueprint for bringing about the spiritual transformation of entire societies.

It is said in the *Kalachakra Tantra* that when the golden age manifests, it will mark the start of a cycle that will last 21,600 years. This cycle of time represents the process it will take for the wheel-turning king to once again return to this continent. This period also corresponds to a much smaller cycle of 21,600 breaths that occur

within a single day. Within this cycle, the energetic winds flow through the central channel six times. When they do, we have an extraordinary opportunity to realize our ultimate nature. That is the true manifestation of the Kalki. When we come to know our buddha nature directly, that is how we will experience the golden age right now.

Seizing This Extraordinary Opportunity

For more than twenty-five hundred years, the Kalachakra has been a source of inspiration and guidance for countless beings. It is my sincere hope that this brief introduction to the secret meaning of Shambhala provides you with a taste of the tremendous potential we each have within us at this very moment. During a time when it is so easy to become lost in the pessimism and confusion of the world, I hope we can all seize this realm of opportunity. By turning inward toward this innate and magnificent potential, we can each find the strength to realize our most heartfelt desires.

When I look back over the stories of the many lineage masters of the Jonang-Shambhala tradition, I am struck by their capacity to cut through the turmoil that often raged around them. Even in the face of vilification by confused individuals who could not understand their teachings, they continued to maintain their unbiased focus on the definitive meaning. It is this continuity of wisdom that allowed them to survive to this day, and I feel enormous gratitude to the masters who have made it possible for these teachings to flourish.

In conclusion, I urge you to not let this wisdom remain merely as a legend—an interesting story to chat about over coffee. Nor should it be restricted to purely scholarly research that only serves to fill your head with endless speculation and theory. For this tradition to be kept alive, it must be taken to heart and its principles put into practice. The real lineage—the real legacy of these teachings—is the unbroken stream of experience these practices produce. It is this

profound realization that reveals our true nature and ultimately unlocks our infinite capacity for peace and harmony.

I will leave you now with verses of aspiration that through the guiding light of Shambhala, you and all beings on this planet may know lasting freedom from suffering and conflict.

OM AH HUNG HO

To the north of the center of the southern continent,
subtle and secret, is the pure and hidden realm of Shambhala
in the shape of an eight-petaled lotus,
surrounded in all directions by a boundary of snow mountains.

Everywhere there are rivers, lakes, forests, and flowers;
their exquisite beauty rivals the glory of the god realms.
In each of the petals, there are twelve kingdoms.
In each kingdom, ten million cities.

These nine hundred and sixty million cities
are protected by ninety-six emanated governors.
The excellent and sublime realm of mantra, this noble land
is guarded by the enlightened minds of the Kalki kings.

At its center is Mount Kailasha,
on which sits the capital of Shambhala—Kalapa.
Between lotus-filled lakes, within marvelous pleasure groves,
lies the wondrous mandala of Kalachakra.
May I be blessed to be born in this perfect realm.

That sublime realm without enemies or contagious diseases,
free from disputes, sorrow, suffering, or terror,
without discrimination between high and low, rich and poor,
where everyone practices the authentic teachings,
especially the secret mantra of Kalachakra—the king of tantras,

dispelling all outer, inner and secret obstacles—
this practice naturally flows from the sacred Dharma.

May I perfectly experience this pure realm and
may I actualize the result of this path of the two stages.[*2]

Having traversed the five paths[*3] and ten levels[*4] within a single lifetime,
attaining perfect buddhahood by accomplishing the four kayas[*5] and the four wisdoms,[*6]
may I be able to emanate forms for the benefit and happiness of all beings without exception.

By the truth of the primordially pure nature of phenomena,
the unfailing interdependence of their conventional reality,
and the accumulated virtues of a pure and superior intention,
may I quickly achieve everything in accordance with this aspiration.

SKIP NOTES

*1 The five chapters are: (1) "The Worldly Realm," (2) "The Individual," (3) "The Empowerments," (4) "The Methods of Practice," and (5) "Primordial Wisdom."

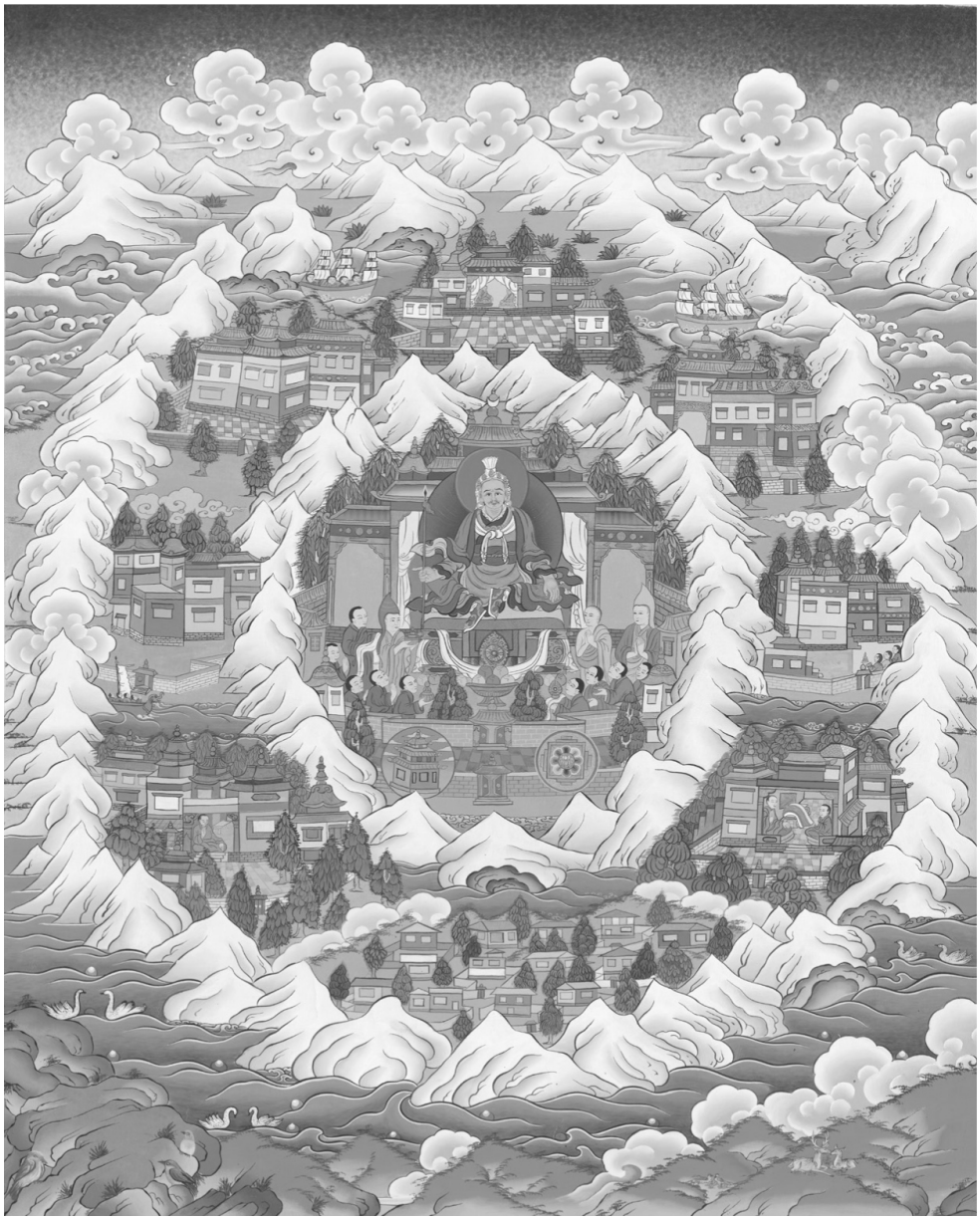
*2 These are the two stages of generation and completion found in the unsurpassed tantras.

*3 The five paths are: (1) the path of accumulation, (2) the path of preparation, (3) the path of seeing, (4) the path of habituation, and (5) the path of no more learning.

*4 The ten *bhumis,* or levels that are achieved by bodhisattvas after entering the path of seeing, are: (1) supreme joy, (2) stainless, (3) illumination, (4) radiant, (5) difficult to overcome, (6) the approaching, (7) far gone, (8) the immovable, (9) good intelligence, and (10) cloud of dharma.

*5 The four kayas, or bodies of a buddha, are: (1) the emanation body, (2) the body of complete enjoyment, (3) the wisdom truth body, and (4) the pure nature body.

*6 The four wisdoms are: (1) the primordial wisdom of vajra-body, (2) the primordial wisdom of vajra-speech, (3) the primordial wisdom of vajra-mind, and (4) the primordial wisdom of vajra-wisdom.



THE MANDALA OF SHAMBHALA

Appendix 1: The Sutric Lineage of the Great Middle Way

When the Buddha first attained enlightenment at the foot of the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, he did not begin teaching immediately. He recognized that the most profound nature of reality was too subtle for ordinary people to comprehend and he would need to provide skillful means to slowly approach this extraordinary experience. As a result, the Buddha taught his disciples in a gradual fashion according to their different capacities.

For those who were gripped by wrong views that led them to engage in destructive behavior, the Buddha taught the nature of cause and effect. Through this first turning of the wheel, his disciples learned to abandon the causes of suffering and to cultivate authentic causes of happiness. By working with such a view, they were able to tame their minds and develop an ethical foundation with which to penetrate deeper into the nature of their personal experience.

From this solid grounding, the Buddha then taught the ultimate nature of conventional reality. Through the teachings of the second turning of the wheel, he introduced his disciples to the empty nature of interdependence. By helping them recognize that anything that arises in dependence on causes and conditions must necessarily be empty of inherent existence, he enabled his disciples to release their intense grasping on to conventional reality. This, in turn, resulted in the dissolution of the self-cherishing mind, which limited their capacity for immeasurable love and compassion.

For those who had completely abandoned grasping on to a dualistic view, the Buddha then taught the third turning of the wheel in which he presented the nondualistic experience of the ultimate nature of reality. Through these teachings on buddha nature, disciples were able to transcend the subtle concepts of subject and object and abide in the natural manifestation of the definitive meaning. Free from all conceptual fabrications, they were finally able to experience the Buddha's ultimate intention of a sublime form of emptiness filled with infinite enlightened qualities. Within this third turning, the ten sutras on the essence[*1] and the ten sutras of definitive meaning[*2] are considered the root sources for what is now known as the view of the Great Middle Way.

Since the view described by these twenty sutras is in direct accordance with the esoteric teachings of the Buddhist tantras, the definitive views of both sutra and tantra are considered to be the same. The tantras simply provide additional skillful means for actualizing this view within the course of a single lifetime. In this way, it is possible to see that all of the Buddha's teachings are free from contradiction and are focused on removing the barriers that prevent realization of the definitive meaning.

Entering the Profound Path of the Middle Way

Following the Buddha's death, or *parinirvana,* in accordance with the prophecies he made, the great pioneer of the Great Vehicle—Arya Nagarjuna—came into this world after more than four hundred years had passed. Although Nagarjuna is most well known for his presentation of the Common Middle Way view, this view actually represents only one portion of his extensive teachings.

Throughout his life, Nagarjuna followed in the footsteps of the Buddha and taught three sets of teachings for the benefit of his different disciples. In his collection of advice,[*3] Nagarjuna provided guidance for both householders and monastics who desired to follow

the Buddhist path. In these teachings, he emphasized the first turning, specifically the karmic law of cause and effect.

To those in whom the seeds of the Great Vehicle had ripened, Nagarjuna presented his collection of reasoning.[*4] These five texts focused on clarifying the meaning of the teachings of the second turning, specifically the view of self-emptiness. It is from these texts that the Common Middle Way was established.

Finally, as he neared the end of his life, Nagarjuna traveled to the south of India to meditate intensively on the teachings. During this time, he attained the exalted view of other-emptiness and composed his third collection—the collection of praises.[*5] It was these writings that focused on his realization of buddha nature and reflected the teachings given in the third turning.

The Vast Path of Yogic Practitioners

While both the Buddha and Nagarjuna taught the foundations of the Great Middle Way, it would take another three hundred years before the community of Indian Buddhists would be ready to understand it fully. A prophecy made by the Buddha stated that more than nine hundred years after his passing into parinirvana, a scholar-monk would appear to expound both the provisional and definitive meanings of the teachings.

In accordance with this prophecy, Arya Asanga was born in the ancient kingdom of Gandhara, which was in the region of present-day Pakistan. It is believed that he was originally a monk following the Foundational Vehicle of Buddhism. Then later, after traveling across India, he encountered the philosophy of the Great Vehicle and quickly adopted that view.

At the age of twenty-five, Asanga developed a strong aspiration to meet and receive teachings from the Buddha Maitreya. With this motivation clear in his mind, he traveled deep into the mountains where he entered into strict retreat for twelve years. Meditating diligently in the face of many hardships and obstacles, he lived an

extremely ascetic existence filled with intense determination. However, after six years of unrelenting effort, he could not see any signs of accomplishment and so became discouraged and decided to abandon his retreat.

After leaving his cave, Asanga encountered a man rubbing a massive iron bar with a piece of silk cloth. Having never seen anything like this before, he became curious and asked the man what he was doing. The man replied, “I am making a needle from this iron bar.” Asanga was astonished. Surely, the man knew it would take hundreds, if not thousands, of years to transform the bar into a needle. And yet, there he was, diligently working away at a task that was clearly quite absurd. Asanga realized that many people spent their entire lives doing pointless things and here he was becoming discouraged after just six years of engaging in the most meaningful activity imaginable. In that moment, he turned around and returned to his cave.

Asanga continued in his retreat for another three years, but still with no apparent sign of Maitreya, he began to lose hope and once again chose to end his retreat. As he traveled down the mountain, he came across a man energetically rubbing a towering boulder with a feather. When Asanga asked what he was doing, he answered, “This boulder is blocking the sun. I’m going to remove it with this feather.” Impressed by the man’s foolish determination, Asanga’s faith was once again restored and he returned to his cave.

Another three years passed (twelve now in total) and Asanga had not experienced even the slightest sign indicating any progress. No longer able to bear the disheartenment, he decided once and for all to abandon his retreat. As the cave disappeared into the distance, Asanga made his way down the mountain and along a dusty road leading into a small town. He noticed on the side of the road an injured dog whose two back legs were mangled and had become infected. Howling in pain and overwhelmed by agony and fear, it snapped and snarled at Asanga as he approached. A great wave of compassion arose in Asanga’s heart and he longed to help this poor creature. Looking at the wound, he knew it needed to be cleaned to

prevent the infection from spreading, but when he knelt to take a closer look, he could see the wound was infested with maggots. He worried that removing the fragile creatures with his fingers would result in them being killed and that even if he was successful, without food the maggots would soon die of starvation. In the end, he decided the only solution was to use his tongue to pick them up and gently place them on a piece of his own flesh.

With a sharp rock, he sliced some flesh from his thigh. Then, bending down, he brought himself closer to the festering wound. Filled with revulsion, Asanga closed his eyes and extended his tongue. Much to his surprise, he never made contact. When he opened his eyes, he saw that the dog had completely disappeared and there, standing before him, was the radiant body of the bodhisattva Maitreya, himself.

Astounded by this unexpected turn of events, he proclaimed, “O Great Lord! Where have you been all of these years? Have you no compassion?” Maitreya responded, “I have been at your side every single day, but you have not been ready to see me. Only now, through your great love and compassion, did you clear away the final obscurations that blocked your perception. If you do not believe me, then carry me through the town and show me to the people.”

Asanga did as Maitreya suggested, declaring “Look! Look! I am carrying the glorious Maitreya on my shoulders!” Almost everyone in the town laughed at the strange man who was madly pointing in the air. Only one old lady had pure enough perception to see a wounded dog on his shoulders. Asanga then understood that it was his own obscurations that had blinded him to the presence of Maitreya.

Soon afterward, Maitreya extended his hand to Asanga and together they traveled to the pure realm of Tushita. Over the course of a single afternoon, he was given extensive teachings, and with each amazing text transmitted to him, Asanga’s mind flooded with realizations. When Maitreya eventually returned him to this realm, he found that twenty-five years had gone by. He then proceeded to write down all of the teachings he had received, resulting in what are now known as the five treatises of Maitreya.[*6]

Recognizing that people were not ready to understand the profundity of the last two texts, Asanga chose to conceal them as treasure teachings to be revealed when the time was right. With the remaining three texts, he founded a monastery and began to expound these vast teachings. In the later part of his life, he spent some time teaching in Nalanda where he eventually rose to the position of abbot. In this way, Asanga was able to successfully propagate his presentation of the Great Vehicle teachings. Asanga's view became known as the Middle Way Philosophy of Yogic Practitioners.

Of all his students, the closest was his half brother, Vasubandhu. Having grown up studying the Vedas, he was known to have an extremely sharp mind and a brilliance for scholarship. Curious to understand more about Buddhist thought, Vasubandhu studied the abhidharma teachings extensively in Kashmir and then wrote an encyclopedic work presenting their view known as the *Treasury of Abhidharma*. When Asanga eventually emerged from his retreat and began to teach his Great Vehicle doctrine, Vasubandhu initially criticized his brother's philosophical position. However, Asanga eventually arranged a meeting with his brother, and when Vasubandhu heard the words of Asanga, great realization arose in his mind and he understood their profundity. Inspired by his brother's wisdom, Vasubandhu went on to produce an ocean of commentaries on various Great Vehicle sutras and treatises.

Vasubandhu's heart disciple was the great logician Dignaga. Known primarily for his work with perception and language, Dignaga provided the basis for a robust system of epistemology. Within this system, he clearly distinguished between knowledge gained through inference or reasoning and knowledge gained through experience. He identified the latter as being the most definitive, thereby reinforcing the experiential approach of yogic realization.

From Dignaga, the teachings of Asanga flowed mostly through Sthiramati, who was renowned for writing commentaries on the works of Vasubandhu. By this time, two traditions had arisen as the dominant schools of thought: the tradition based on the writings of

Asanga and his followers, which was known as the Lineage of Vast Conduct; and the tradition of Nagarjuna and his followers, which was known as the Lineage of Profound View.

In the seventh century, Sthiramati's student, the great lay practitioner Chandragomin, went on to demonstrate the power of the definitive meaning. As a child, Chandragomin studied with many of the leading Great Vehicle scholars of his time. He became very proficient in the five sciences of a bodhisattva[*7] and a strong proponent of Asanga's philosophy. He then received many pith instructions that allowed him to manifest various miraculous displays, such as having direct visions of Avalokiteshvara and Tara. After becoming a highly accomplished scholar-practitioner, Chandragomin went on to write many texts.

Eventually, he traveled to Nalanda and challenged the scholar Chandrakirti to a debate. Over the course of many years, the two discussed the Dharma, with Chandragomin presenting Asanga's view and Chandrakirti presenting that of Nagarjuna. Through the power of his sharp intellect, Chandrakirti would respond very quickly to the questions posed by Chandragomin, while Chandragomin would often take his time, reflecting on their meaning. Although he sometimes did not reply right away, his answers always contained profound wisdom.

Through their exchange, Chandrakirti was largely responsible for popularizing the school of philosophy known as the Middle Way Consequentialists. Proponents of this school interpreted Asanga's teachings to be provisional in nature and, therefore, labeled them as propounding the philosophy of Mind Only. While this interpretation was understandable from a particular perspective, it showed only a partial understanding of the true intent of the teachings. As a result, many people became confused about the differences between the Mind Only view and the view of the Great Middle Way. This confusion seems to have arisen largely due to the fact that only the first three texts of Maitreya were readily available at the time and, therefore, many people lacked the necessary realization to reveal their definitive meaning.

The Contemplative Tradition of Maitreya

The full depth of Maitreya's teachings would not become known until the eleventh century, during the time of the great yogic practitioner Maitripa. Originally an ordained monk at the monastic university of Vikramashila, he was known for his scholarship and pure morality. However, after receiving profound instructions from the tantric master Naropa, he developed extraordinary realizations and eventually left that monastery to continue his practice in remote regions beyond the judgmental eyes of those who lacked pure view.

One day, while wandering in the wilderness, Maitripa came upon a stupa. He noticed light spilling out from a crack in its side, and upon taking a closer look, he found three texts nestled inside. These were the two hidden treatises of Maitreya plus a commentary on the *Sublime Continuum* by Asanga himself. However, since he had not received the oral transmission for these texts, Maitripa was not able to understand them. With a strong aspiration to bring benefit to sentient beings, he supplicated Maitreya, who miraculously appeared before him and bestowed upon Maitripa the full blessings of the lineage. Maitripa returned to Vikramashila and began to teach these texts for the first time. In this way, the definitive meaning of Maitreya was finally revealed, shining a brilliant light on Asanga's ultimate intention. It was at this moment that the Great Middle Way tradition was established.

From the many students of Maitripa, the teachings and pith instructions for their practice made their way west to the region of Kashmir. Nearing the end of the eleventh century, the great translator Ngok Lotsawa traveled to Kashmir to study and translate the Buddhadharma. Accompanying him was an aging Tibetan man by the name of Tsen Kawoche. Ngok Lotsawa requested the full transmission of the *Sublime Continuum* and other texts by Maitreya. Satisfied by these teachings, he then returned to Tibet. Tsen Kawoche, however, remained in Kashmir and with the help of another translator called Gawe Dorje, requested meditation instructions based on the teachings of the Buddha Maitreya in

preparation for his own death. In this way, the contemplative tradition of Maitreya was transmitted to Tsen Kawoche.

On their return to Tibet, both Gawe Dorje and Tsen Kawoche began to propagate these teachings to everyone who requested them. While very little is known about the early masters of this contemplative tradition, in accordance with the writings of the Tibetan master Taranatha,[*8] the teachings were passed as a whispered lineage between masters and heart disciples within the monasteries of the Kadam tradition. Eventually, they found their way into Nartang Monastery where they were passed to Kyoton Monlam Tsultrim and his heart disciple Chomden Rikpe Reldri.

From Rikpe Reldri, the lineage of Maitreya was then brought to the famed Sakya Monastery by Kyiton Jamyang Drakpa. Kyiton had been a well-respected scholar and practitioner at Nartang Monastery, but at the start of the fourteenth century, due to political reasons, he and his students decided to leave. They traveled to Sakya, where Kyiton was welcomed as a great master and offered residence. While he had mastered all aspects of both the sutras and tantras, he especially emphasized the teachings of the definitive meaning as presented in the ten sutras on the essence, the ten sutras of definitive meaning, and the five treatises of Maitreya. As a result of his vast knowledge and profound pith instructions, Kyiton attracted many excellent students who would continue to integrate these teachings into their own traditions.

The Importance of the Great Middle Way

As we look back at the evolution of Buddhist thought, we can see a clear progression representing the relative maturation of practitioners at different stages of their spiritual development. From the time of the Buddha, there had always been exceptional disciples who could comprehend both the vast and the profound. However, it took more than fifteen hundred years for the general Buddhist community to be ready for such teachings. When they were finally

able to grasp the full extent of the Buddha's intention, the treasury of advanced techniques stored within the tantric teachings were unlocked and began to flourish.

Similarly, when these lineages first made their way into Tibet, they were not propagated widely as there were so few people capable of understanding them. Instead, they were passed quietly from teacher to disciple over the course of three to four hundred years. It was not until the beginning of the fourteenth century that all of the conditions were gathered to enable the wisdom of the Great Middle Way to manifest on a much larger scale.

What this shows us is that this sutric tradition plays a vital role in establishing the conditions for then engaging in the tantric tradition. While there may be some who are capable of entering into the Vajra Vehicle from the start, the vast majority of people need a more gradual approach. Therefore, if our aim is to experience the peace and harmony of Shambhala on a global scale, we must first acquire intricate knowledge about the subject matter of the Great Middle Way. Said another way, we must learn about buddha nature. It is this subject alone, when presented within the context of the bodhisattva path, that provides the foundation and the gateway for the experience of the definitive meaning.

SKIP NOTES

*1 *The ten sutras on the essence are*: (1) *the Sutra on the Tathagata Essence,* (2) *the Dharani for Entering the Nonconceptual,* (3) *the Sutra of the Lion's Roar of Shrimaladevi,* (4) *the Sutra of the Great Drum,* (5) *the Sutra to Benefit Angulimala,* (6) *the Sutra of Great Emptiness,* (7) *the Sutra Presenting the Great Compassion of the Tathagata,* (8) *the Sutra Presenting the Inconceivable Qualities and Primordial Awareness of the Tathagata,* (9) *the Extensive Sutra of the Great Cloud, and* (10) *the Sutra of Great Nirvana.*

*2 *The ten sutras of definitive meaning are*: (1) *the Perfection of Wisdom in Five Hundred Lines,* (2) *The Answers to Maitreya's Questions,* (3) *the Ghanavyuha Sutra,* (4) *the Sutra on Utterly Quiescent and Certain Magical Meditative Concentration,* (5) *the Cloud of Jewels Sutra,* (6) *the Great Excellent Golden Light Sutra,* (7) *the Definitive Commentary on the Intention,* (8) *the Lankavatara Sutra,* (9) *the Sutra Ornament of the Appearance of Primordial Awareness, and* (10) *the Avatamsaka Sutra.*

*3 *The seven texts in the collection of advice are*: (1) *Precious Garland,* (2) *Letter to a Friend,* (3) *Tree of Wisdom,* (4) *A Hundred Wisdoms,* (5) *Drops for Healing Beings,* (6) *Commentary on Bodhichitta, and* (7) *Compendium of Sutras*.

*4 *The five texts in the collection of reasoning are*: (1) *Root Verses of the Middle Way on Wisdom,* (2) *Refutation of Objections,* (3) *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness,* (4) *Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning, and* (5) *Crushing to Fine Powder*.

*5 *The four main texts in the collection of praises are*: (1) *Praise to the Dharmadhatu,* (2) *Praise of the Supramundane,* (3) *Praise of the Inconceivable, and* (4) *Praise of the Ultimate*.

*6 *The five treatises of Maitreya are*: (1) *Ornament of Clear Realization,* (2) *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras,* (3) *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes,* (4) *Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmata, and* (5) *Sublime Continuum*.

*7 The five sciences of a bodhisattva are: (1) the science of language, (2) the science of logic, (3) the science of medicine, (4) the science of fine arts and crafts, and (5) the inner science of spirituality.

*8 Taranatha identifies the early Tibetan masters to be Tsen Kawoche, Dharma Tsondru, Dolpa Nyen Yeshe Jungne, Jangchup Kyap, and Shonnu Jangchup.

Appendix 2: The Tantric Lineage of the Six Vajra Yogas

Once again, we return to the start of the second century CE. The Great Vehicle movement of India is still in its infancy and the realm of Shambhala has already been transformed significantly by more than eight hundred years of guidance from their Dharma kings. At this time, with Shambhala rapidly advancing beyond what was perceptible to ordinary human beings, the kings of Shambhala knew that if steps were not taken, the karmic connection between Shambhala and India would soon dissolve and their capacity to benefit those beings would be lost.

To prevent this from happening and to strengthen their karmic connection, the Kalki kings manifested as various teachers in India and its surrounding regions. For example, it is said that, in the fifth century, an emanation of Kalki Vishnugupta traveled to Kashmir where he became known as "The One Who Came from the Sky." In this form, he taught various texts of the Vajra Vehicle and also wrote practice manuals for Vajravarahi, Ekajata, and other systems of tantra. In this way, he contributed to the tantric teachings taking root in the northwest of India.

At the same time, tantra was gaining strength in the east at the great monastic universities such as Nalanda, Odantapuri, and Vikramashila. Once the teachings of Arya Asanga were established, the profound wisdom of Maitreya's texts revealed the definitive meaning of buddha nature and thus provided a crucial link between

the sutras and tantras. Slowly, the teachings of Buddhist tantra were starting to be studied more openly. As a result, respect for tantric practitioners grew significantly, leading many to seek out the highly realized yogic masters known as mahasiddhas to be their gurus.

It is during this period of rapid growth within the tantric community that I believe a very special text known as the *Entrance to Kalapa* appeared. This text was unique because it provided step-by-step instructions for how to experience Shambhala using the tantric systems that existed in India at that time. While the date and author of this text is shrouded in mystery, its presence at this time would account for how a general knowledge of Shambhala existed before the arrival of the Kalachakra teachings centuries later. This text would go on to play a vital role in inspiring practitioners to seek out this magnificent realm and retrieve the treasures of its teachings.

The Textual Transmission of Kalachakra

Over the course of the next four to five hundred years, following this initial rise of tantra, the realizations of Indian yogis developed significantly. Even though their understanding of the subtlest ultimate nature was still limited, by the start of the tenth century, the number of mahasiddhas had increased substantially and there was a wealth of authentic commentaries that could be used to unlock the hidden secrets of the vajra teachings.

Around this time, a boy was born in the eastern kingdom of Orissa. He spent most of his life studying the Buddhist texts at the monastic universities where he was known by the name Cilu. Through his extensive understanding of the vastness of the Buddha's teachings, Cilu realized that the Vajra Vehicle was the only vehicle capable of producing buddhahood within a single lifetime. He also comprehended that the actualization of the final stages of this path required guidance from bodhisattvas of the highest level of realization. Only their wisdom would be sufficient to unveil the full splendor of the definitive meaning of reality.

Through his studies (possibly from reading the *Entrance to Kalapa),* Cilu learned of the existence of Shambhala and of the great bodhisattva kings who ruled there. Encouraged by a vision of his personal deity, Tara, Cilu decided to set out in search of the famed bodhisattva trilogy—a collection of esoteric commentaries believed to hold the secrets of nondual wisdom.[*1] He gathered supplies and set out on his quest.

After a long and arduous journey across oceans and deep into snow-covered mountains, Cilu eventually was met by what seemed to be an ordinary monk. That monk knew that the way to Shambhala was extremely difficult and so, out of great compassion, offered to bestow the empowerments and teachings that Cilu sought. Realizing that this monk was an emanation of Manjushri, Cilu felt blessed and realizations arose in his mind. Satisfied with having achieved everything he set out to do, Cilu traveled back to his home in Orissa.

Under Cilu's guidance, the monastery of Ratnagiri became an important center for the study of Kalachakra. Through the study of *Stainless Light,* Indian *panditas* were introduced to the profound wisdom of the *Kalachakra Tantra* as well as the magnificent history of the realm of Shambhala. In this way, the people of India continued to form strong connections with Shambhala, which in turn prepared the ground for the Kalachakra teachings to eventually thrive in that region.

At this time, Cilu had taught the bodhisattva trilogy extensively in all of the major monastic centers and had gained many disciples, including the Bengali master Pindo Acharya. War eventually came to Orissa, and so the texts were buried to keep them safe from pillaging soldiers. When the teachings were later excavated, they found that half of the commentaries on Chakrasamvara and Hevajra were missing. Pindo approached Cilu, requesting a second transmission of these texts so they could be restored to the lineage. Cilu refused, stating that the *dakinis* must have concealed the teachings for a reason. The only text left fully intact was *Stainless Light*.

The Transmission of the Kalachakra Pith Instructions

Through the enormous efforts of Cilu and Pindo, the *Kalachakra Tantra* gained considerable attention from fellow scholar-practitioners. Unlike other esoteric treatises of the time, the *Kalachakra* presented a vast body of knowledge that clearly differentiated it from other teachings. Due to its great clarity, it provided key insight into the definitive meaning that was obscured by esoteric language in other systems. Both of these features were instrumental in making the *Kalachakra* highly sought after.

However, here it is important to remember the Buddha's teachings on the four reliances. Simply studying the words without fully comprehending the meaning is not enough. The *Kalachakra Tantra* cannot produce buddhahood in one lifetime through the mere pursuit of dualistic knowledge. It must be put into practice in order to transform that knowledge into experience. However, since the methods of practice are not always clear from solely looking at the text, we must rely on the pith instructions of an authentic lineage holder who can guide us through each stage of practice and ensure that we reach our ultimate aim.

With this in mind, we turn our attention to the end of the tenth century, when a devout Bengali couple who practiced the yoga of Yamantaka gave birth to a young boy. That boy grew up and eventually took ordination as a monk where he was known as Manjuvajra. He studied in the monastic universities of his time and quickly excelled in each of the five areas of scientific knowledge. He became known far and wide as a master of the Buddhist sutras and tantras. During this time, he also studied Kalachakra under Pindo Acharya. Rapidly mastering everything that Pindo had taught him, Manjuvajra's thirst for wisdom was still not quenched.

In a vision, Manjushri appeared to Manjuvajra telling him to travel north to the land of Shambhala, for it was only there he would find the teachings he sought. Following the instructions of his personal deity, Manjuvajra set out northward. The reigning Shambhalan king, Kalki Aja, recognized that Manjuvajra would surely die if he

attempted to reach his kingdom alone, so he sent an emanation to meet him halfway.

When they met, the man asked Manjuvajra, “Where have you come from, where are you going, and what are you searching for?” He replied, “I have come from India, I am going to Shambhala, and I am searching for the pith instructions of the *Glorious Kalachakra Tantra*.” The man then explained that the way to Shambhala was dangerous; however, he could offer the teachings that he required.

Recognizing the emanation, Manjuvajra performed prostrations and made extensive offerings. He then requested the teachings and pith instructions for realizing the definitive meaning of Kalachakra. The king’s emanation manifested the enlightened mandala of Kalachakra and proceeded to bestow the complete set of empowerments on his fortunate disciple. Thus, he gave Manjuvajra all of the pith instructions for engaging in the six vajra yogas of the Kalachakra path.

Over the course of a few months, Manjuvajra diligently practiced these profound instructions until he developed the higher perceptions.[*2] At that time, he was able to directly experience the royal court of Kalapa and meet the Kalki king Aja in person. It was from the Kalki himself that Manjuvajra received extensive teachings on all of the root texts and commentaries of Kalachakra. Having memorized these teachings, he returned his mind to India where he committed them to writing. These verses would later be known by the Tibetans as *The Whispered Lineage of Dushapa*.[*3] In this way, for the first time, a complete form of the Kalachakra teachings became manifest in this world.

When Manjuvajra returned home to eastern India, it was this path that he taught to all who were fortunate enough to listen. As a result, he acquired many students and his fame spread throughout the region. However, of all his students, he had three main heart disciples: Avadhutipa, Shribhadra, and Bodhibhadra.

Avadhutipa had originally been a very dull-witted monk who, after many years of tantric practice, developed the capacity to memorize anything that he wrote. As a result, he was incredibly learned due to

studying and copying many texts. After meeting Manjuvajra, he received all of the empowerments and pith instructions for practicing Kalachakra. Even though he once could barely remember his own name, through his diligence and devotion, he was able to achieve a phenomenal level of realization and soon became a much sought-after teacher.

The Propagation of Kalachakra through Nalanda

The second heart disciple of Manjuvajra was a lay practitioner named Shribhadra. He was originally born into the merchant caste of eastern India. Through hard work and determination, he gathered all of the Buddha's teachings, becoming a well-respected scholar-practitioner of both sutra and tantra. While he knew almost everything there was to know about the Buddhadharma in general, he knew relatively little about Kalachakra and, therefore, sought out teachings from Manjuvajra and his student Avadhutipa.

After receiving all of the profound pith instructions, Shribhadra went into retreat deep within a forest. Through the power of his unshakable meditative absorption, he experienced the presence of many enlightened realms filled with deities. In time, he perfected the six vajra yogas and achieved the state of buddhahood through the practice of Kalachakra. With his extraordinary realizations, Shribhadra displayed many siddhis, such as walking on water and effortlessly passing through walls and mountains.

Shribhadra believed that if the Kalachakra teachings took root in Magadha,[*4] then they would easily spread everywhere else. He constructed a Kalachakra temple within the renowned Nalanda Monastery and proceeded to attract many scholars and yogis as his disciples. From that time on, the mahasiddhas produced by Kalachakra far outnumbered all of the mahasiddhas produced by the other systems combined. Of his twelve main disciples, all of them achieved the supreme attainment of rainbow body—becoming fully enlightened beings.

Near the start of the eleventh century, the Tibetan translator Gyijo Dawe Oser invited Shribhadra to Tibet to help translate the Kalachakra texts. He accepted, and together the two successfully produced a draft translation of *Stainless Light*. This was the first translation of any Kalachakra text to be made available in the Tibetan language. Gyijo Lotsawa then gave all his students extensive teachings and pith instructions for practicing Kalachakra, allowing them to collectively continue to refine the translations.

The heart son of Shribhadra was known by the name Bodhibhadra. He had previously received an ocean of teachings from both Manjuvajra and Shribhadra. With his unwavering faith in the Kalachakra teachings, Bodhibhadra placed the well-known monogram of Kalachakra—the tenfold syllable of power—on the front gate of Nalanda Monastery. Below the monogram, he posted a message:

> Those who do not understand the Primordial Buddha do not understand Kalachakra. Those who do not understand Kalachakra do not understand the *Litany of Manjushri's Names*. Those who do not understand the *Litany of Manjushri's Names* do not understand Vajradhara's body of primordial wisdom. Those who do not understand Vajradhara's body of primordial wisdom do not understand the Mantra Vehicle. Those who do not understand the Mantra Vehicle are all those in cyclic existence and are not on the path of the victorious Vajradhara. This being so, all pure teachers should rely on the Primordial Buddha and take with them all pure students intent on liberation.

In this short passage, Bodhibhadra was essentially claiming that if you do not understand buddha nature, then you will not be able to fully realize enlightenment. To the more than five hundred scholars living in Nalanda at this time, this was an incredibly bold statement to be making. As a result, they lined up in droves to debate with him. One after another, each challenger was defeated by his impenetrable logic and unimaginable realizations. In this way, Bodhibhadra was

able to demonstrate both the profound and vast nature of the Kalachakra teachings and to establish it as the king of all tantras. Filled with devotion, the monks of Nalanda bowed before him and requested that he become their abbot. Accepting the position, Bodhibhadra became a teacher to a great many disciples who in turn each became experts themselves. Those students were largely responsible for the proliferation of the Kalachakra lineages throughout the land.

One important note here is that Bodhibhadra did not reserve his teaching only for monks and yogis; he also taught many lay practitioners from the royal and merchant classes. These students were instrumental in sponsoring the reproduction of texts, which made it possible for the Kalachakra teachings to flourish throughout northern India. As a result of their efforts, by the end of the eleventh century, Kalachakra was being practiced more than all of the other systems combined.

The Transmission of Kalachakra to Tibet

From the students of Manjuvajra, Shribhadra, and Bodhibhadra, many teaching and practice lineages emerged, seventeen of which made their way into Tibet.[*5] While each offered authentic teachings from the *Kalachakra Tantra*, the collections of pith instructions varied and, therefore, some were considered more complete than others. In terms of practicing the six vajra yogas, one tradition in particular became especially renowned—the Dro tradition, which came through the Kashmiri scholar Somanatha.

Somanatha was born into a Brahmin family, but at the age of twelve, his Buddhist mother sent him to study the Buddhadharma from the master Suryaketu. Under the guidance of Suryaketu, Somanatha become an expert in the five sciences, particularly mastering Nagarjuna's Middle Way philosophy and his noble cycle of Guhyasamaja.

One day, Suryaketu received gifts from a disciple of Manjuvajra. The first was the section on the Kalachakra empowerment taken from the *Primordial Buddha Root Tantra,* and the second was a number of extracts from the third and fifth chapters of the *Abridged Kalachakra Tantra*. Suryaketu was greatly pleased by these gifts and placed them on his students' heads while reciting prayers for their quick realization. When his students asked what these texts were, he told them they were taken from a profound tantra that he had never received and consequently was unable to teach them.

Suryaketu then passed the texts on to Somanatha, who eagerly studied them and developed great respect for the teachings. His heart filled with devotion, he decided to travel to Magadha in search of masters who could explain these texts to him. Arriving at Nalanda, he was fortunate enough to receive extensive teachings from both Shribhadra and Bodhibhadra.

Under their guidance, he mastered the first four of the six vajra yogas. He completely pacified his subtle winds, giving rise to the experience that all phenomena were merely the play of awareness. Due to his deep reverence for these practices, he was extremely strict about who he passed them on to. In his whole life, he only taught three students the entire cycle of teachings. To the rest of his students, he only gave instructions on the practice of the first yoga.

On three occasions, Somanatha traveled to Tibet, where he gave teachings on many different texts including Nagarjuna's collection of reasoning and the five treatises of Maitreya. However, of all the teachings he gave, the one he emphasized most was the *Kalachakra Tantra*. During this time, he had three heart disciples: Dro Lotsawa, Lhaje Gonpa, and Namla Tsek.

On Somanatha's first visit, he was commissioned to translate half of the *Stainless Light* commentary. During this process, he became displeased with the result and moved to Penyul in western Tibet. There, he began work on a new translation in collaboration with the Tibetan translator from the Dro clan who was known as Dro Lotsawa. Together they translated the *Abridged Kalachakra Tantra*

and the first four chapters of the extensive commentary. Somanatha himself then translated the fifth chapter on primordial wisdom.

Based on these texts, Somanatha gave extensive teachings and instructions to Dro Lotsawa and a tantric practitioner from the Nyingma school known as Lhaje Gonpa. After putting the teachings into practice, Lhaje Gonpa developed great power and became famous for pacifying various demons who used black magic. As his fame grew, students began to gather and request teachings from this great Tibetan yogi.

One of Lhaje Gonpa's main students was the great tantric practitioner and scholar Namla Tsek. He first received the complete transmission of the Kalachakra teachings and pith instructions from Lhaje Gonpa. Then, during one of Somanatha's later visits, he received teachings directly from the Kashmiri pandita on the texts of Nagarjuna and Asanga, as well as supplementary teachings on literature and medicine. Under the direct guidance of these two superlative masters, Namla Tsek attained the capacity to communicate with his *yidam* deities as though they were right there beside him. Of the three heart disciples of Somanatha, Namla Tsek was most responsible for propagating the Kalachakra teachings in accordance with the Dro lineage.

The Whispered Lineage of Dushapa

While Somanatha and his students were surely great scholars, the Dro lineage they transmitted has always been renowned for the power of its pith instructions. In the early stages of this tradition, Somanatha placed a seal of secrecy upon these teachings to ensure that the authenticity of the lineage was maintained until the time was right to introduce them to a wider audience. Because of this, the lineage became known as the Whispered Lineage of Dushapa.

The yogic master that came to be most strongly connected to this lineage was the great mahasiddha Yumo Mikyo Dorje. Yumo was born in the early eleventh century to a nomadic family in western

Tibet. With many new translations flowing into the country, people were not yet connected to any particular school or tradition; instead, they would move from monastery to monastery, collecting whatever teachings they could. It was a particularly inspiring time for spiritual practice, and when Yumo was ten years old, his entire family decided to take ordination together.

As a monk, Yumo studied philosophy and epistemology, taking a particular interest in the teachings of Shantideva. When Yumo eventually became a tantric yogin, he was originally drawn to the *Hevajra Tantra* as interpreted by Vajragarbha in his commentary from the bodhisattva trilogy. It is said that when Yumo first heard the name of this collection, he experienced a powerful flood of faith and devotion. Eager to learn more, he began asking who could provide him with an explanation of these texts. He was told to seek out Somanatha.

Yumo soon moved to central Tibet, and while continuing his study of Shantideva, he heard a rumor that an Indian scholar was nearby. Curious to identify this scholar, he went to investigate and found that it was indeed Somanatha. Overjoyed, Yumo quickly requested teachings. Somanatha, however, refused his request and asked him to transport various offerings he had accumulated back to Nepal.

While he initially agreed to the task, Yumo later developed doubts and chose to request teachings from Namla Tsek instead. Namla Tsek accepted Yumo as his student and for the next four years, he bestowed all of the empowerments, teachings, and pith instructions upon him. Yumo was even fortunate enough to eventually receive teachings from Somanatha himself during this time.

Now in possession of a treasure of teachings, Yumo withdrew into the mountains where he dedicated the rest of his life to intensive meditation. It is said that he achieved amazing powers including the ability to emanate himself in different forms such as crows and magpies. Also during this time, Yumo wrote his influential cycle of teachings known as the four brilliant lamps.[*6] Through these texts, Yumo became one of the first Tibetan yogis to articulate a view of the definitive meaning on the basis of his own experiences.

Of Yumo's many students, his closest was his biological son who was known by his Sanskrit name Dharmeshvara. This great son of Yumo was a child prodigy and a gifted scholar of great intelligence. When he was only sixteen, he was already writing commentaries to highly advanced root texts of Kalachakra. It is said that, by the age of twenty, he fully comprehended all of the profound instructions his father had to offer. In this way, the complete Kalachakra teachings passed from father to son and Dharmeshvara, too, became a highly realized adept. This legacy of wisdom was then kept within the family, passing to his three children: Namkhe Oser, Machik Jobum, and Namkhe Gyaltsen.

Namkhe Oser was the eldest son of Dharmeshvara. Extremely learned in both sutra and tantra, he chose to focus on Maitreya's five treatises as well as the *Guhyasamaja* and *Kalachakra Tantras*. During his life, he composed many texts on these subjects, including the renowned *Garland of Radiance*. It is said that he developed a particularly strong connection to the female deities Vajravarahi and Sarasvati.

Machik Jobum was Dharmeshvara's daughter, and at a very young age, by the influence of her mother, she was encouraged to practice the Yamantaka tantra—a wrathful form of Manjushri. On the basis of these practices, she was able to subdue a number of negative forces and bind them as dharma protectors. She became so powerful that she could prevent many types of calamities and produce miracles for the benefit of others. Then, at the age of thirty-six, she became very ill and realized that instead of developing more magical powers, she should dedicate the rest of her life to achieving enlightenment.

Relying on the Kalachakra teachings she had received from her father, Machik Jobum entered into retreat on the six vajra yogas. In the course of a single day, she attained the ten signs of attaining the first yoga. By the end of the week, she had completely pacified her inner winds and attained the state of a mahasiddha. When in retreat, she would not eat for weeks or even months at a time and yet her physical strength never diminished, and her body remained radiant and healthy. She would often stay in extremely remote caves and

rock shelters unreachable by ordinary beings. On one occasion, she stopped an outbreak of a highly contagious disease by merely reciting the Kalachakra mantra. At another time, she healed the sick by simply placing her hands upon their bodies. Machik Jobum hence became renowned as a great Kalachakra siddha.

The younger brother of Machik Jobum was named Namkhe Gyaltsen. He was born with hearing and speech impediments, and for this reason it was widely believed his life would never amount to anything. Due to the kindness of his sister, however, he received the instructions for practicing the vajra yogas. Then, under the guidance of his older brother, Namkhe Oser, his mind became spontaneously awakened. He went on to master both the *Chakrasamvara* and *Hevajra Tantras* as well as the six dharmas of Naropa. After many years in retreat, he eventually settled in central Tibet and established Semoche Monastery.

Namkhe Gyaltsen's heart disciple was known as Jamyang Sarma Sherab Oser, or Jamsar Sherab for short. Originally born into a Nyingma family in Upper Nyan, he took ordination and began to study the full range of the Buddha's teachings. When he became afflicted with leprosy, he went into an extensive Vajrapani retreat for more than a year and a half. As a result of this practice, he completely purified his body, freeing himself from the sickness. During this retreat, Jamsar Sherab had a vision of Manjushri who told him of his karmic connection with Namkhe Gyaltsen and that he should seek him out as his teacher.

While he was traveling toward the home of Namkhe Gyaltsen, he was attacked by malevolent forces that caused rocks to fall from above. Breaking into a song of realization, he proclaimed that through the unshakable power of his pure perception, he no longer feared the elements. In this way, he was able to dispel all obstacles. When he finally arrived at Namkhe Gyaltsen's hermitage, he requested the Kalachakra teachings and received extensive commentary on *Stainless Light* and the pith instructions of the vajra yogas. It is said that when Namkhe Gyaltsen bestowed the ripening

empowerments, Jamsar Sherab perceived his master in the actual form of the Kalachakra deity.

Jamsar Sherab was known to teach the Buddhadharma while abiding in a perpetual state of realization of the definitive meaning. In his dreams, he would often travel to pure lands such as Shambhala and Sukhavati. Through the fame of his attainments, he established many retreat hermitages where people could practice the Kalachakra path.

Jamsar Sherab's heart disciple was the omniscient Choku Oser, who was named after a prophecy that foretold he would develop the ability to abide in the dharmakaya state of an enlightened being. Choku Oser grew up to become a master of the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*. One day, his father told him to seek out Jamsar Sherab and request the Kalachakra teachings.

Choku Oser did as his father asked. As he received the Kalachakra empowerment, he was reported to have experienced his vajra master in the form of Vajravega—the wrathful form of Kalachakra. At the time of entering into the mandala, he had a clear vision of the mandala of primordial wisdom. When his master bestowed upon him the highest fourth empowerment, his mind became completely free of all conceptual fluctuations, and he experienced immutable bliss. From this point forward, his mind was inseparable from the pristine wisdom of Kalachakra.

On one occasion, while visiting with Namkhe Gyaltsen, Choku Oser was told that he and Jamsar Sherab had shared many lifetimes as teacher and disciple. It was here that Choku Oser was then identified as being a reincarnation of the great Kashmiri scholar Shakyashri.

Up until the time of Namkhe Gyaltsen, the six vajra yogas had been a closely guarded secret passed on in a very strict lineage of teacher to disciple. Starting with Jamsar Sherab and continuing through Choku Oser, these restrictions were loosened, and the Kalachakra began to be practiced more openly by a greater number of people.

The Necessity of the Vajra Yoga Path

Here, it is worthwhile to consider how these two traditions of sutra and tantra work together to give rise to the perfect manifestation of Shambhala. From the perspective of the path, we start with the Great Middle Way because it introduces us to the idea of buddha nature and helps us clarify why that nature is not currently manifesting. Through studying the sutras, we gain a conceptual understanding of our potential and the benefits of experiencing that. Then, through meditation, we are able to thin out all of the coarse obscurations and limitations and thus create the conditions for our buddha nature to arise.

However, the sutric path alone is not enough to experience buddhahood in a single lifetime. For that, we need the yogic methods that are offered in the tantric path. This is due to the interdependent nature between our mind and body. Even though our mind may fully grasp the nature of reality, as long as we are karmically connected with this physical body, the appearance of that nature will remain conditioned by that body. Since the body is the result of a dualistic mind, the appearances that arise in dependence upon it are also dualistic in nature. This means that in order to directly experience the fullness of the nondualistic experience of buddha nature, we need to work directly with the subtle body.

It is in this way that we say the sutric path is limited. It does not contain any teachings on the subtle body or how to work with that body skillfully. The methods that we need are only presented in the unsurpassed tantras such as Kalachakra. Therefore, we cannot achieve the fullness of Shambhala without eventually relying on the vajra yoga path. For this reason, the sutric path is seen as provisional in nature. It provides us with the conceptual foundations we need to progress quickly into the definitive tantric path where we complete our training and achieve buddhahood.

*1 *The bodhisattva trilogy consists of*: (1) *the Extensive Commentary on the Kalachakra Tantra Known as Stainless Light by Kalki Pundarika,* (2) *the Commentary on the Hevajra Tantra by Vajragarbha, and* (3) *the Commentary on the Chakrasamvara Tantra by Vajrapani.*

*2 The five higher perceptions are: (1) the divine eye, (2) the divine ear, (3) knowing the minds of others, (4) perceiving one's own and others' past lives, and (5) performing miraculous displays.

*3 Dushapa Chenpo is the Tibetan name for Manjuvajra. It means "Great Lord of Kalachakra."

*4 Magadha was home to Nalanda Monastery, the spiritual center of Indian Buddhism at that time.

*5 The seventeen lineages of the vajra yogas are: (1) the six vajra yogas of the translator Gyijo Dawe Oser; (2) the six vajra yogas of the translator Ma Gewe Lodro; (3) the six vajra yogas of the translation from Trom Padma Oser; (4) the six vajra yogas from Atisha Dipamkara received from Krishnabhijna; (5) the six vajra yogas known as the Dro tradition from Somanatha; (6) the six vajra yogas of the translator Ra Chorab from Samantashri; (7) the Tsami tradition of Yogamala composed by Tsami Sangye Drak; (8) the six vajra yogas of Rechung Dorje Drakpa from Amoghavajra; (9) the six vajra yogas of the Kalachakra's own tradition from Galo to Shang Tsalpa; (10) the six vajra yogas of the mother tantra Hevajra from Galo to the great Sakyapa; (11) the six vajra yogas of the father tantra Guhyasamaja from Galo to Geshe Kyura Akyab; (12) the six vajra yogas using the esoteric instructions of Naropa from Shakyashri to Chal Chokyi Sangpo; (13) the six vajra yogas in accordance with the six vajra verses given to Sakya Panchen by Shakyashri; (14) the long lineage of Vibhuti, six vajra yogas in the tradition of Anupamarakshita of Vibhutichandra from Ratnarakshita; (15) the short lineage of Vibhuti, given to Vibhutichandra from a direct experience of Shavaripa; (16) the six vajra yogas of the translator Chak Choje Pal from Ravindrarakshita and Rahulashribhadra; and (17) the six vajra yogas of the Litany of Names of the Menlung Guru, Punyashri.

*6 The four brilliant lamps are four texts that present: (1) emptiness, (2) luminosity, (3) union, and (4) mahamudra.

Appendix 3: The Golden Age Tradition of the Jonang

The story of the Jonang begins with the story of its founder, the great Kalachakra yogi Khunpang Thukje Tsondru. Born in 1243, Thukje Tsondru grew up, took ordination, and studied within the monasteries of Sakya and Ngor. During that time, he amassed a great deal of knowledge, receiving many teachings, including the transmission of the *Kalachakra Tantra* in accordance with what was known as the Ra tradition.

After Thukje Tsondru defeated many scholars in debate, he was asked to become the abbot of the monastery of Kyangdur. There, he received the Kalachakra empowerments, teachings on the Kalachakra textual transmission, and step-by-step experiential transmission of the six vajra yogas in accordance with the Dro tradition from the great master Choku Oser. It was this tradition that became the core of Thukje Tsondru's personal practice.

Aware that the seventeen collections of pith instructions existed within different lineages, Thukje Tsondru developed a deep yearning to gather them all together. For this reason, he began to travel throughout the land, receiving all of the teachings from each of the lineage holders. He then went into retreat to develop direct experience of everything he had received. As a result, he gained mastery over the subtle movements of his energy and was able to manifest the higher perceptions.

At this stage, Thukje Tsondru completely abandoned all of his responsibilities as a teacher and scholar and instead chose to dedicate his life to retreat in remote mountain hermitages. While meditating in the famed hermitage of Se Karchung, he developed a powerful urge to write a commentary on the *Kalachakra Tantra*. He brought to mind the lineage masters and requested their permission to pursue this aspiration. Each of the Kalki kings then appeared before him, bestowing on him inconceivable blessings and profound teachings.

Soon after this vision, Thukje Tsondru was visited by the local goddess Jomo Nakmen Gyalmo, who requested the great yogi to take up residence in the Jomonang Valley. Thukje Tsondru agreed to do so in three years' time. During that period, he was also visited by a number of representatives from the communities living in the area. They each requested him to establish a permanent base from which the Buddhadharma could flow.

True to his word, Thukje Tsondru traveled to the south of Tsang and settled into a small hermitage in the Jomonang Valley that he named Khacho Dedan, which means "Bliss-Infused Enjoyment of Space." At this site, he had a vision of the Kalachakra deity, wrote a complete root text and commentary for the essential tantra, and also penned the first written guidance manuals for the six vajra yogas in accordance with the oral instructions. Through these texts, he emphasized that the vajra yogas were the supreme method for the realization of the unity of immutable bliss and empty form.

Word of Thukje Tsondru's great achievements spread throughout U and Tsang. Soon, yogis from all traditions were flocking to his side to learn from his vast wisdom. At any given time, there were roughly six hundred dedicated practitioners meditating in the valley. Eventually, the encampment came to be known as the Jonang Mountain Retreat, and those who followed Thukje Tsondru were known as Jonangpas.

Thukje Tsondru was nonsectarian in his approach and had no difficulty giving teachings on all subjects from both the ancient and new translations. Despite his great respect for all other systems, the

Kalachakra Tantra remained his heart practice. Twice a year, for the twenty-one years he lived in the Jomonang Valley, he would teach Pundarika's *Stainless Light*. This emphasis on Kalachakra became the defining characteristic of all Jonang practitioners.

In the year 1313, as Thukje Tsondru was nearing the end of his life, he chose to appoint Jangsem Gyalwa Yeshe as his regent. Gyalwa Yeshe was born in the Dokham region of eastern Tibet. Ordained at a very young age, he became a follower of the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi. Even though he practiced diligently, he was unable to give rise to any significant realizations and, therefore, the Karmapa told him this was a sign that he had not yet met the right teacher and suggested that Gyalwa Yeshe wander the land until he found him. If he maintained a nonsectarian view—free from all forms of bias—he would surely find what he was seeking. This search led him to study with many teachers from all of the major traditions of his time. However, when he met Thukje Tsondru for the first time, Gyalwa Yeshe's mind was immediately filled with overwhelming faith and devotion. He went on to receive all of the treatises and oral instructions from his most precious guru, and when he practiced the six vajra yogas, great realizations arose in his mind. After Thukje Tsondru passed into parinirvana, Gyalwa Yeshe became his regent and led the Jonang Monastery for the next seven years.

Another of Thukje Tsondru's heart disciples was Khetsun Yonten Gyatso. Originally from the Dok region of Tsang, he had grown up in the Nyingma tradition, studying psychology and epistemology in Dar Monastery. Later on, he spent much of his time studying at the great Sakya Monastery where he received an ocean of teachings from the tenth Sakya throne holder. Like Gyalwa Yeshe, he received various teachings on Kalachakra, Hevajra, and the teachings of Maitreya. He even traveled to the imperial court of Kublai Khan in China as an attendant to his master before returning home to continue his studies. By this stage, Yonten Gyatso had become extremely learned and so his master urged him to seek out Thukje Tsondru so he could focus more on the path of meditation.

At Jonang Monastery, Yonten Gyatso received many transmissions from Thukje Tsondru, including the complete bodhisattva trilogy and a wide variety of oral instructions from different traditions of the vajra yogas. When Yonten Gyatso meditated on these instructions, he quickly experienced the nighttime and daytime signs connected with the first yoga of individual withdrawal, leading to the experience of unimpeded clairvoyance.

He stayed at Jonang Monastery for a total of thirty-eight years, meditating intensively on the vajra yogas. It is said that he mastered every teaching available in Tibet and was particularly renowned for his great moral discipline. When Gyalwa Yeshe entered into parinirvana in 1320, Yonten Gyatso assumed the role of abbot.

The Kalki King of Tibet

At this time, Tibet was controlled by the Mongolian empire of Kublai Khan. Due to his spiritual relationship with the Sakya master Chogyal Phakpa, the administration and governance of the country was made the responsibility of Sakya Monastery. And yet, even though the Sakya held a preferential position with relation to their Mongol overlords, by the end of the thirteenth century, the Tibetan province of U-Tsang was still experiencing a spiritual renaissance. Due to the kindness of many unbiased masters, the Dharma of both the new and old translations was truly flourishing. It was within this unique environment of outstanding scholarship and realization that one of Tibet's most influential and visionary adepts would arise.

According to the prophecies of the *Sutra of the Great Dharma Drum,* a great monk would be born at a time when the true Dharma was declining and would propagate the teachings on buddha nature. As the last embers of the Buddhadharma began to fade away in the Noble Land of India, a boy was born in the remote mountains of Nepal in a region called Dolpo. This boy's name would come to be known far and wide as the Omniscient Buddha of the Three Times—Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen.

As a young boy, Dolpopa followed the Nyingma tradition of his family, practicing the cycles of Vajrakilaya and receiving many tantric empowerments. On one occasion, after receiving the Red Manjushri empowerment, it is said his intelligence ripened enormously and he developed a fervent desire to study the Buddha's teachings.

When he turned twelve, Dolpopa became a monk and began seeking opportunities to engage in study on a broader scale. While the Nyingma were known for their emphasis on the tantras, the Sakya had developed great fame for their scholarship. Dolpopa's good fortune gave him the opportunity to create a strong Dharma connection with the Sakya lama Kyiton Jamyang Drakpa as he passed through Dolpo on his way to Mustang. At that time, Dolpopa desperately wanted to follow Kyiton, but his parents were adamant that he continue his studies of the tantras according to the Nyingma tradition.

Not willing to accept his parents' wishes, Dolpopa ran away from home when he was seventeen and made his way eastward to the Mustang region where Kyiton had been teaching for the past five years. Upon arriving, he began his study of philosophy, epistemology, psychology, and cosmology, quickly mastering the general structures and terminology of these fields. He was soon able to engage in sophisticated discussions and debates with many of the elder students. When his master, Kyiton, was called back to Sakya to attend to an urgent matter, Dolpopa eventually followed suit.

By the time Dolpopa took up his studies once again with Kyiton, he had gained the reputation of being a very strong-willed and independent thinker. Unlike the other students who attempted to achieve mastery over one topic at a time, Dolpopa would study all subjects together in parallel. This unique approach allowed him to gain a vast perspective on each topic and in little more than a year and a half, he achieved mastery of them all.

While Dolpopa studied with some of the greatest Sakya masters of his time, he mainly followed the teachings of Kyiton. Due to his enormous respect and veneration for the six vajra yogas, Kyiton

emphasized Kalachakra above all else and, as a lineage holder of the contemplative tradition of Maitreya, he also emphasized the study and practice of Maitreya's teachings on the definitive meaning. It was these two influences that would form the foundation for many of Dolpopa's future philosophical innovations.

Under the guidance of Kyiton and other masters of Sakya Monastery, Dolpopa quickly developed an excellent understanding of both the sutras and tantras. In addition to Kalachakra, he also received significant instruction on the *Hevajra Tantra* and its system of practice known as the path and its result (*lamdre*).

Eventually Dolpopa was requested to give his first teaching. In preparation, he went to the nearby monastery of Tanak, and for three months studied under the master Rinchen Yeshe who gave him extensive teachings and pith instructions on the five treatises of Maitreya. When he returned to Sakya, he gave a vast exposition on the five topics of philosophy, epistemology, psychology, cosmology, and monastic discipline. Just as with his earlier study technique, he taught each topic in parallel, covering three subjects in the morning and two in the afternoon. By the time he had completed his teachings, Dolpopa had proven himself as a masterful scholar and one of the brightest stars in the Sakya tradition.

Regardless of how learned he became within the walls of Sakya, Dolpopa displayed no bias toward other traditions. When he was twenty-two, he set out on a tour through the regions of U and Tsang, visiting all of the major centers for learning. As he studied with teachers from each of the prominent traditions, all of them recognized him to be a particularly intelligent scholar, and soon people began to refer to him as "The Omniscient Dolpopa."

By the time Dolpopa returned to Sakya, he had received teachings from more than thirty different teachers and had mastered a vast ocean of Dharma. After giving many empowerments and teachings, he entered into retreat on Hevajra and achieved many signs of accomplishment such as visions of the main deity and the eight goddesses. At the age of only twenty-eight, he was enthroned as the abbot of Sakya Monastery.

A year after his enthronement, Dolpopa took an expedition to the surrounding monasteries. During this trip, he visited the Jonang Mountain Retreat for the first time and was astounded by the sheer quantity of highly realized beings he encountered. Later, he would often comment that he had never been so humbled as when he saw that every single Jonang practitioner had achieved a direct realization of the nature of reality through meditation. When he left the Jomonang Valley, his mind was inspired and filled with faith in the strength of the Jonang Dharma.

From there, he traveled to the Kagyu monastery of Tsurphu where he met with the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. The two spoke at length about the Buddha's teachings and the Karmapa prophesied that Dolpopa would soon exceed his already high level of realization. The combination of these two events weighed heavily on the mind of Dolpopa and, within a year of returning to Sakya, he decided to abandon his prestigious position in favor of dedicating his life to meditation.

The night before Dolpopa set out for Jonang, one of his teachers, Kunpang Drakpa Gyaltsen of Sakya, dreamed of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara completely enveloped by rays of light and surrounded by many monks making their way toward Jonang. At the same time, the great Kalachakra master Yonten Gyatso of Jonang had a dream of the Kalki king Pundarika raising the victory banner of the Buddha's teachings in Jonang.

The next day, when Dolpopa and his entourage of eight monks arrived in Jonang, Yonten Gyatso gave him all of the Kalachakra empowerments, an oral transmission of the bodhisattva trilogy, and all of the pith instructions for the six vajra yogas. As a gesture of auspiciousness, Yonten Gyatso offered Dolpopa the hermitage of Khacho Deden where Thukje Tsondru himself had meditated. Dolpopa immediately entered into retreat and only emerged to give teachings and empowerments at the request of Yonten Gyatso and the patriarchs of Sakya Monastery.

When he had completed bestowing the great empowerment of Kalachakra, Dolpopa again entered into strict retreat. For one year,

he meditated without distraction on the six vajra yogas. On the basis of his practice of the first two yogas, Dolpopa purified his vision and beheld an infinite display of deities and pure realms. Then, on the basis of the third and fourth yogas, he completely subdued his subtle energies and experienced the blazing of his inner fire. It was in this moment that the nondual view of sublime emptiness arose in his experience. Recognizing that he had encountered something truly remarkable, he chose not to speak of it right away; instead, he continued his retreat for another three years and stabilized his realizations through perfecting the first three yogas.

Dolpopa eventually emerged from his retreat, and soon after, Yonten Gyatso requested he become his Dharma heir and assume the monastic seat of Jonang Monastery. Wanting only to continue his practice of meditation, he decided to travel to Lhasa and make prayers at the famed Jokhang temple. Before the holy image of Avalokiteshvara, he asked which would be the greater benefit, retreat or taking the position as abbot of Jonang. From the heart of the statue emerged rays of light and Dolpopa heard verses telling him to accept the Dharma throne. When he returned to Jonang, he was officially recognized as Yonten Gyatso's successor.

From that point on, Dolpopa alternated between periods of meditation and teaching. Each year he spent the summer and winter in retreat, and during the seasons of autumn and spring, he gave teachings. His main emphasis was on the many texts of definitive meaning that he had received from his teachers, but no matter what he taught, he always connected the teachings back to Pundarika's great commentary on Kalachakra.

In 1327, Yonten Gyatso passed into parinirvana. As homage to his beloved master, Dolpopa decided to build a massive stupa inspired by the one he had seen in Trophu. Not only would this stupa be a tribute to his master's unceasing kindness, but it would also become a beacon of faith for all those who were unable to directly study or practice the Buddha's more advanced teachings.

Artisans and laborers from all over the countryside began to flock to the site, each wanting to contribute whatever skills they had in

order to realize Dolpopa's vast vision. People donated raw materials for the stupa and offered provisions for the many workers. As each stone was laid, the workers chanted an endless stream of MANI—the mantra of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. Fame of the project spread, and soon offerings from the four corners of Tibet were making their way to Jonang.

As the stupa was slowly taking shape, Dolpopa gave teachings at its base. This was the first time he publicly taught his ideas on how to clearly distinguish between the views of the widely accepted emptiness of self and what he referred to as the sublime emptiness of other. On numerous occasions, he taught this view from both the tantric perspective using the bodhisattva trilogy as his source, and also the sutric perspective using the twenty sutras of buddha nature and the five treatises of Maitreya.

Through further discussion with some of the most astute scholars of his time, Dolpopa refined the presentation of his view. This led him to compose an exhaustive treatise titled *Mountain Doctrine: An Ocean of Definitive Meaning*. In this single text, Dolpopa drew from a vast number of sources in both the sutras and tantras in order to point out the error of holding the view of self-emptiness to be the ultimate nature of reality. For every argument raised against his view, Dolpopa provided an abundance of scriptural sources and logical reasoning, proving his ideas to be an accurate representation of the definitive meaning of the Buddha's teachings. While the many subsequent Tibetan proponents of Rangtong philosophy have tried to discredit or marginalize his ideas, his arguments have stood firm against all criticism and continue to be as completely valid now as they were then.

One of the distinguishing features of Dolpopa's work was his introduction of new terminology, used to describe different aspects of the ultimate nature. He also transformed the meaning of many previously used philosophical terms in order to further clarify his position. Fully understanding what it meant to practice the four reliances, he used language in a very flexible way and was not fixed to the conventions of his time. This may have been one of the reasons

why many scholars reacted so strongly against Dolpopa. In many ways, he had completely changed the way emptiness was expressed and many struggled to adapt.

Another major characteristic of Dolpopa's work was his extensive use of quotations to substantiate his ideas. Drawing from numerous authentic sources, time and time again, he demonstrated the consistent intent behind the Buddha's vast teachings. In this way, he wove a cohesive and unified vision of how to understand the definitive meaning at the levels of ground, path, and result.

On the basis of the insight he had developed on the definitive meaning, Dolpopa noticed that the current translations of the *Kalachakra Tantra* and its commentary *Stainless Light* were both in need of revision. With the help of his students, Dolpopa commissioned a new translation of the texts based on the original Sanskrit editions available at the time.

While his students worked on translating, Dolpopa himself wrote extensive annotations and a summary of the texts to allow the definitive meaning to become more apparent. While Dolpopa's summary is still available, his annotations are now extremely rare and have become difficult to distinguish from those of his students.

After the completion of the Great Stupa, the Jonang valley became an important place of pilgrimage where people from all over Tibet would travel to make prayers. Dolpopa's fame had spread, and he was now openly recognized as being one of the highest and most revered teachers of the time. In the years to follow, Dolpopa would spend most of his time traveling from region to region constructing shrines and temples, while engaging in extensive meditation retreats. In one of these retreats, Dolpopa reported to have seen the Sublime Realm of Shambhala and had traveled there through the power of his meditation. During other retreats, he spent his time studying every aspect of the Buddha's teachings and writing an abundance of treatises and practice manuals.

Nearing the later part of his life, Dolpopa turned his attention to the increasing political turmoil occurring between the Sakya rulers of Tsang and their political rivals the Phakmodru in central Tibet. As

their Mongolian patrons began to decline, the Sakya Dynasty was unable to prevent their rivals from seizing the province of U and, eventually, Tsang as well. In this way, the balance of power shifted in Tibet and the style of administration reverted back to the brutal strategies used during the imperial age of the ancient Tibetan kings.

In the wake of this power struggle, many temples and shrines were being damaged beyond repair, and Dolpopa knew something had to be done. Even though he was now sixty-six and it was difficult for him to travel, he was determined to promote peace and harmony by making his way to Lhasa where he would make prayers before the Jowo image of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Out of their deep respect for their master, his students carried him atop a palanquin and made their way slowly through the winding valleys of Tsang. Everywhere he stopped, he was received by throngs of devotees who lavished him with offerings and praise. The crowds of people attending his teachings were so large that interpreters had to relay his words to those who were unable to hear from the back.

After six months of travel, he finally arrived in Lhasa where he proceeded to make extensive offerings of gold and butter lamps. He stayed for a further six months, giving teachings to an endless stream of people flowing in from the surrounding regions. There were so many, in fact, they couldn't fit into the teaching halls. On more than one occasion, the sheer weight of the crowd caused doorways to buckle and stairways to collapse.

After three long years of touring, Dolpopa finally made his way back to Jonang. For the next year he stayed in his hermitage, giving blessings and teachings to an endless stream of visitors who traveled from all over the country to meet him. Then, in the autumn of 1361, at the age of sixty-nine, Dolpopa displayed signs that his time in Tibet was coming to an end.

Soon afterward, Dolpopa began to give what would be his last public teaching on the *Mountain Doctrine* as well as extensive instructions for engaging in the preliminary practices of the Kalachakra path. After six days, having taught only half of the text, he informed his students he would teach no more. He entrusted

them to take good care of this teaching and gave them final advice for their practices. Dolpopa displayed no signs of sickness or pain and, by all accounts, looked more radiant and healthier than ever.

That evening, Dolpopa gathered his eldest disciples and conveyed a detailed presentation of the tenfold syllable of power. When everyone had gone, he went to sleep, waking only to ask his attendant, “Is it dawn yet?” Stating that not even half the night had passed, Dolpopa replied, “Soon it will be dawn.” When dawn finally arrived, Dolpopa sat up, adjusted his robes, and then entered into a state of deep meditation. With his eyes wide open, he sat staring straight ahead. A few minutes later, he passed into parinirvana.

The Fourteen Heart Disciples of Dolpopa

Following the passing of their beloved teacher, the responsibility for upholding Dolpopa’s teachings fell upon the shoulders of his fourteen heart disciples. Like rays of light emanating from the sun, these disciples emerged from the heart of Jonang and took residence in a variety of monasteries and hermitages throughout U and Tsang. As each disciple was a highly realized practitioner of the vajra yogas, they not only defended Dolpopa’s philosophy through logic but also through the shining example of their own profound realization.

The first was Kunpang Chodrak Pal. After helping Dolpopa complete the Great Stupa in Jonang, Chodrak Pal decided to focus on strict solitary practice. His retreat was short-lived, however, as he was invited to teach at Chosang Monastery in order to help them establish their academic curriculum. After accepting, he spent many years teaching a wide range of subjects and was known to have taught the Kalachakra commentary four times. When he wasn’t teaching, Chodrak Pal would spend the remainder of his time in retreat. It is said he achieved many meditative experiences such as seeing the pure land of Buddha Amitabha as well as the colors of his own subtle energy. After further intensive practice, he developed a

number of clairvoyant capacities as well as the ability to manifest in whatever form he chose.

On behalf of Dolpopa, Chodrak Pal traveled to China where he demonstrated his powers to the emperor and taught the Dharma over the course of seven months. He recounted the stories from Dolpopa's life and gave the emperor a precious relic that had been retrieved from the bones of Dolpopa after his cremation. As he returned to his home in Chosang, he stopped many times along the way, teaching the Kalachakra commentary as well as other subjects.

When he was eighty-one years old, Chodrak Pal was invited to give teachings in Palteng Monastery. Through his clairvoyance, he could see this would be a dangerous journey for him, but, nonetheless, he accepted the invitation. While traveling through a mountain pass, his party was attacked by a local warlord who stabbed Chodrak Pal to death. His body was then cremated at Chosang Monastery.

The second was Lotsawa Lodro Pal, who was forty-one years old when Dolpopa gave him a collection of sacred objects and declared him to be his successor to the Jonang throne. Over the course of the next fifteen years, Lodro Pal commissioned a number of adornments for the Great Stupa including statues of the sixteen arhats, thirty-two pillars for the main dome, and eighty short pillars for the podium. Under his stewardship, both Jonang Monastery and the Great Stupa shone with brilliance. When he passed away, his cremation was marked by many miraculous signs, such as rainbows filling the sky and the shaking of the earth.

The third was Sabsang Mati Panchen, who, after receiving the complete transmission of Dolpopa's vast knowledge, grew into a renowned scholar and yogi. In 1337, he was invited to teach at the Sabsang Ganden Monastery where he spent a year giving commentary on *Stainless Light*. The masters there were so impressed that they offered the entire monastery to him as his own. During the rest of his life he traveled throughout the region giving many teachings. It is said that he was always surrounded by a retinue of at least four hundred students.

The fourth was Shangton Gyalwo Sonam Drakpal, who had studied with Dolpopa for twenty-eight years of his life. When he was sixty-four, he was offered four monasteries from where he constructed a life-sized statue of Dolpopa out of gold. When his teacher Chodrak Pal consecrated the statue, many great omens were said to be seen such as flowers falling from above and rainbows filling the sky. Every summer for the next fifteen years, Sonam Drakpal would teach the bodhisattva trilogy and pass the rest of his time either meditating or writing books. In this way, he perfected the wisdoms of hearing, reflecting, and meditating.

The fifth was Jonang Chokle Namgyal, who, after giving teachings on the Kalachakra at the Ngamring Monastery, was invited to become their abbot. Soon after Lotsawa Lodro Pal died, Dolpopa requested him to take his place. For the next four years, Chokle Namgyal guided both Ngamring and Jonang. Eventually, though, with Dolpopa's blessing, Chokle Namgyal retired from his positions at both monasteries and moved to the hermitage of Se Karchung where he entered into strict retreat. It wasn't until Dolpopa's death that he reemerged and once again took the role of Jonang's abbot. This time, he would stay fifteen years, giving extensive teachings on the Kalachakra commentary.

By the age of seventy-two, Chokle Namgyal traveled to Lhasa and other parts of central Tibet, teaching the Kalachakra to vast numbers of people. Upon arriving back at Tsang, he returned once again to his retreat at Se Karchung. It is believed that on his way back to the hermitage, his party narrowly escaped an attack by the same warlord responsible for the death of Chodrak Pal. Chokle Namgyal's clairvoyance was credited as being the only reason for their safe arrival at their destination. Chokle Namgyal remained in Se Karchung until his death in 1386.

The sixth was Tsechen Nyabon Kunga Pal, who stayed with Dolpopa until he was fifty-six years old. During that time, he received extensive teachings from Dolpopa and his other disciples such as Chokle Namgyal. For a time, Nyabon Kunga was invited to Sakya

where he spent many years teaching the philosophy of other-emptiness and the *Kalachakra Tantra*.

In 1366, Nyabon Kunga founded Tsechen Monastery where he lived for the remainder of his life, teaching extensively on philosophy, epistemology, and the extensive commentary of Kalachakra. Over time, he amassed close to six hundred students, making Tsechen one of the larger Jonang institutions in U-Tsang. Mati Panchen is known to have traveled to Tsechen to help Nyabon Kunga consecrate many sacred objects and the temples he built there. At the age of ninety-five, he passed away while resting in the clear light of his own natural purity for eight days.

The seventh was Choje Rinchen Tsultrim, who was fifty-eight when he was invited to Tolung Namgyal Monastery. There, he took up residence and taught the Kalachakra commentary extensively, as well as many other subjects. He also built a large image of the Buddha Maitreya and invited Mati Panchen to consecrate it.

From there, he traveled to Gungtang Monastery, giving instructions on the six vajra yogas. During his stay, he entered into a five-day debate in which it is said he was able to defeat everyone who challenged him. All those present developed great faith in him as both an accomplished yogi and a great scholar. As he neared the end of his life, he returned to Tolung Namgyal and spent the next three years giving teachings on the bodhisattva trilogy. At the same time, he wrote a commentary in two very large volumes, titled *Entering the Path of the Two Accumulations*.

The eighth was Manchu Khawa Lodro Gyaltsen, who had become a close disciple of Chokle Namgyal, receiving many empowerments and instruction into different traditions such as Guhyasamaja and Chakrasamvara. In 1358, he traveled with Chokle Namgyal to central Tibet as his attendant. While they were returning through Tsang, Lodro Gyaltsen was offered the small hermitage of Manchu, and, at the urging of his master, he took up residence there and went into retreat.

One day while meditating intensively, Lodro Gyaltsen had a dream of the Buddha Maitreya riding on a radiant white lion. He was

surrounded by sixteen arhats and spoke the words of the five treatises of Maitreya. He woke the next morning to the sound of a dharma conch announcing the arrival of the great Mati Panchen who was riding a white yak-cow hybrid and was accompanied by sixteen monks. Lodro Gyaltsen saw this as a very auspicious omen and developed great faith in Mati Panchen, perceiving him as being inseparable from Maitreya. He took the opportunity to request Mati Panchen to bestow teachings on the five treatises of Maitreya to which Mati replied, "I already taught you in the dream and so it is unnecessary to repeat them here." Nevertheless, he eventually agreed, and over the next month he gave extensive teachings to over one thousand monks who had gathered there.

The ninth was Tangpo Chungwa Lodro Pal, who took over for Rinchen Tsultrim as the abbot of Tolung Namgyal after he passed away. Over the years, he gave many teachings, especially emphasizing the *Kalachakra Tantra*. When he eventually died, he remained in meditative absorption on the clear light of death for forty-nine days, during which time his body did not decompose at all.

The tenth was Garungpa Lhe Gyaltsen, who, after his extensive study with Dolpopa and his disciples, was requested to be abbot of Gharung Monastery. He taught there continuously for many years, drawing on his vast knowledge of all the traditions he had studied. He then moved to Nechen Namkha Dzo Monastery where he constructed many holy objects, enhanced many of the temples, and gave many teachings. He also wrote a detailed commentary on the six vajra yogas titled *The Beginning, Middle, and End*.

The eleventh was Tangpoche Kunga Jobum, who was forty-eight when he traveled to Tanak Monastery where he became abbot and taught the *Kalachakra Tantra* for the next six years. He then moved to the Yarlung region where he was given another monastery and gave continuous teachings on *Stainless Light* until his death at age seventy-two.

The twelfth was Choje Phuntsok Pal, who received full ordination from Dolpopa and was later invited to teach Kalachakra and the vajra yogas at Sangphu Monastery in U. Later, he went to Babrim

Monastery and gave even more extensive teachings on Kalachakra and the view of other-emptiness as presented in the sutras of definitive meaning.

When Phuntsok Pal traveled to Lhasa to give teachings on mind training, he had the opportunity to visit Sera and Drepung monasteries. There, he debated with hundreds of scholars who held nihilistic views. By the end, he had clarified the Dharma enormously, earning the respect of all those attending.

Soon after that, he founded a retreat center called Kalapa in the Penyul region just north of Lhasa. In his hermitage, he taught the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* to those of limited capacity while teaching the six vajra yogas to those of greater capacity. When he passed away, he remained absorbed in the clear light for seven days amid many miraculous signs.

The thirteenth was Tsalminpa Sonam Sangpo. After Dolpopa passed away, Sonam Sangpo continued his studies with the most preeminent masters of his time and is perhaps best known for being the brightest of Nyabon Kunga's hundreds of students. He also received teachings from Mati Panchen, Chokle Namgyal, and others.

When he was sixty-three, he was offered the monastery of Tsalmin, and, from that time on, he became an important lineage master within the Kagyu tradition. With his truly unbiased attitude, Sonam Sangpo became teacher to many great masters of the fifteenth century, including the sixth Karmapa, Tongwa Tonden. He was respected by everyone he met and out of his great kindness, continued teaching even after becoming ill at the end of his life. He is known to have taught the Kalachakra right up to the age of ninety-two, a year before his death.

Finally, the fourteenth heart disciple of Dolpopa was Drikung Lotsawa Manekashri, who met Dolpopa near the end of his life as the great master traveled through U and Tsang. In the little time he had with Dolpopa, he received extensive teachings and instructions on the six vajra yogas. After Dolpopa's death, he went to meditate in Drakkar Choteng where many people are said to have witnessed Drikung Lotsawa speaking with the animals. As such, they developed

great faith in him and wished to study with him. After three years, many of his students became great scholars.

On another occasion, Drikung Lotsawa was requested to give the Kalachakra empowerments in accordance with the Dro tradition to a local warlord and three hundred monks. At that time, the sky completely filled with rainbow light and many people reported seeing him place his bell and vajra in space while levitating above the ground.

After many years of being away, he finally returned to Jonang Monastery to give teachings to the monks. Upon seeing the Great Stupa, he thought of his beloved master and broke down into tears—such was his love for Dolpopa. By the time he turned seventy-five, he was finding it difficult to perform most activities and was invited to go into retreat. He refused to stop and, instead, chose to continue teaching the bodhisattva trilogy. A few years later, he passed away.

Through the tireless determination and immeasurable kindness of these great masters, the Jonang Dharma successfully expanded throughout the region of U-Tsang. In addition to Dolpopa's own works on the philosophy of other-emptiness, the fourteen heart disciples were also responsible for writing many commentaries, expanding and clarifying many of the points that were difficult to comprehend. Subsequently, this profound understanding of the definitive meaning slowly became integrated into many of the existing monastic institutions.

The Origins of the Nonsectarian Movement

While many accomplished practitioners embraced the teachings of Dolpopa, this was not the case for everyone. For some, the teachings were simply too confrontational and seemed to contradict what they had been taught by other Tibetan masters. This was particularly the case in the newly formed monasteries of Ganden, Drepung, and Sera. These monasteries were the home to the Geluk tradition founded by Tsongkhapa Lobsang Drakpa.

In the years following the passing of Tsongkhapa and his heart disciples, the doctrine in these monasteries began to be limited to a strict interpretation of the Middle Way that held the view that self-emptiness was the definition of the ultimate nature of reality. In contrast, the view of a sublime other-emptiness endowed with infinite enlightened qualities was seen as eternalistic and became branded as heretical. All texts related to that view were subsequently forbidden within those monasteries.

While this ban obviously included the teachings of Dolpopa and his disciples, it also included select teachings from some of the founding fathers of those monasteries, such as Jamyang Choje of Drepung Monastery and the esteemed teacher from Sera, Lodro Rinchen Senge. Both of their collected works were deemed as promoting the philosophy of other-emptiness and were thus sealed off. These sorts of extreme actions fueled a perception of antagonism between the proponents of self-emptiness and those of other-emptiness.

As a result of their extreme position, over the course of a few hundred years, the flames of sectarianism became stronger and the Geluk along with their supporters found themselves increasingly more isolated. While the other traditions continued to emphasize an unbiased approach to both study and practice, deep divisions were growing among the traditions.

With less and less interest in needlessly debating their philosophical view, the Jonang masters chose instead to focus their energy on developing realizations through yogic meditation. Although they continued to specialize in Kalachakra, many of their greatest masters held an array of lineages from different systems. For this reason, they were sought out by many students from other traditions, making Jonang Monastery a hub of nonsectarian scholar-practitioners.

A good example of one such master was Drupchen Kunga Lodro, a heart disciple of Nyabon Kunga. Originally born into the privileged Sharkhapa family of Tsang, Kunga Lodro had repeated visions of Dolpopa when he was five years old. By the time he was eight, he had

developed a remarkable degree of renunciation and took ordination from the Sakya lama Sonam Gyaltsen. He was later recognized to be the reincarnation of the Kalachakra master Buton Rinchen Drup.

For the next thirteen years, Kunga Lodro studied intensively under the guidance of his main teacher, Nyabon Kunga. He also received teachings from many of the Jonang masters such as Chokle Namgyal. When Nyabon Kunga founded his monastery, Kunga Lodro followed him there to continue his studies. By 1386, he had assumed the monastic seat of Tsechen as Nyabon Kunga's successor.

After witnessing the futility of worldly conflicts, Kunga Lodro became completely disillusioned and chose to enter into solitary retreat. For the next fifty years of his life, he dedicated almost all of his time to meditation, achieving great realization. While his main practice was the six vajra yogas, he also had a reputation for practicing many systems, making him a much sought-after teacher. He imparted many teachings on the vajra yogas, the path and its result, the five stages of Guhyasamaja, and the six dharmas of Naropa, Niguma, and Sukhasiddhi. Regardless of what he taught, he always emphasized the importance of going beyond study and that the teachings provide profound instructions that need to be practiced.

The main student of Kunga Lodro was Jamyang Konchok Sangpo. Having studied for a time at Jonang Monastery, he chose to sharpen his mind through debate by traveling to many other monasteries in the region. Eventually, he made his way to Lhasa, where he had two powerful visionary experiences that left a deep impact on his mind. The first occurred when visiting the Jowo image of Shakyamuni Buddha. As he stood before the statue of the Dharma lord, rays of light emanated out of the Buddha's heart and dissolved into him. All thoughts completely ceased, and he entered into a deep meditative absorption on the definitive nature of reality.

The second took place when he saw the statue of Dolpopa in the Jokhang temple. From the statue's heart, he saw countless emanations of Dolpopa radiating outward and pervading all of space. All of the emanations absorbed back into the statue, bringing it to

life. From this miraculous emanation, Konchok Sangpo received many previously unknown instructions. Upon hearing these teachings, countless realizations arose in his mind.

Konchok Sangpo continued his tour of the various monasteries until eventually settling at Tsechen Monastery, where he took Kunga Lodro as his root guru. From Kunga Lodro, Konchok Sangpo received an array of empowerments, esoteric commentaries, and an ocean of instructions for the practice of all the unsurpassed tantras, as well as those of the lower tantras. He was also given the special instructions of the Shangpa tradition and thus became a supreme unbiased master of both sutra and tantra.

Over the coming years, Konchok Sangpo would hold the monastic seat at a variety of monasteries in different traditions. Remarkably, he was simultaneously the fourteenth throne holder of Jonang, the abbot of Tsechen, the abbot of the Bodong monastery of Samding, and the abbot of the nonsectarian monastery Pelkhor Dechen.

While meditating in Pelkhor Dechen, it is said he had a vision of the Kalki kings of Shambhala, who urged him to teach the six vajra yogas. After emerging from his retreat, he gave teachings to approximately three hundred monks, during which time many people had remarkable experiences, ranging from abiding in absorption on the clear-light mind to developing the capacity to see over long distances. Everyone who attended these teachings was deeply transformed. Thus, Konchok Sangpo went on to become an important lineage holder for the Jonang, Sakya, and Shangpa Kagyu.

Of his many students, Namkha Chokyong would become the main lineage holder for the six vajra yogas. Born in Tsang, he studied the Dharma from a very early age and rose to be the assistant abbot of Ngamring Monastery. He received most of his teachings on the *Kalachakra Tantra* and the six vajra yogas from his main teacher, Konchok Sangpo, and through his guidance, Namkha Chokyong became an expert on the Jonang philosophy of other-emptiness. For a time, Namkha Chokyong was the abbot of Tsechen Monastery before finally being enthroned on the monastic seat of Jonang itself. During his tenure as abbot, he gave extensive teachings while also

restoring and repairing the Great Stupa and the surrounding retreat centers of Dewachen, Kyipuk, and Khacho Deden.

Namkha Chokyong's successor at Jonang was the rime master Gorum Kunga Lekpa. Gorumpa had received most of his early training in the monasteries of Palung and Sakya and became a highly accomplished practitioner of the path and its result system. He went on to become an important lineage holder of the Shangpa Kagyu tradition when he received the key instructions of mahamudra and the six dharmas of Niguma from Kunpang Doringpa. In the later part of his life, he became a close disciple of Namkha Chokyong, obtaining extensive teachings on Kalachakra and the six vajra yogas. During his time at Jonang, he studied the complete works of Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen and the commentaries by Chokle Namgyal, leading him to become a great proponent of other-emptiness.

Gorumpa spent most of his time meditating and often reported having received visionary teachings from various deities and deceased masters such as Kunpang Thukje Tsondru. After becoming abbot of Jonang, there were always as many as seventy monks and nuns in sealed three-year retreats and hundreds more experienced yogis conducting strict private retreats. When Gorumpa stepped down from his seat in 1528, he appointed his dharma brother Namkha Palsang to take his place.

Panchen Namkha Palsang was trained in Namgyal Drakpa's northern tradition of Kalachakra by Shangpa Kunga Palden. He then went on to study Kalachakra with the Jonang under the guidance of Namkha Chokyong. After achieving profound realizations through the practice of the six vajra yogas, Namkha Palsang founded the monastery Drepung (not to be mistaken for the Geluk monastery of the same name) where he spent all of his time teaching the vajra yogas to a steady stream of yogis and yoginis. For over eighteen years, he held the monastic seat of Namgyal Draksang where the royal family of Jang all became his disciples. While he taught extensively on the Kalachakra and the collected works of Dolpopa, Namkha Palsang also gave instructions on the practices of Chakrasamvara, Hevajra, Guhyasamaja, Vajrabhairava, the six

dharmas of Niguma, Machik Labdron's teachings of Chod, the Kadam teachings of mind training, and many others.

Following Namkha Palsang was the highly realized adept Rinchen Sangpo, more commonly known by his Sanskrit name of Lochen Ratnabhadra. After studying at several large monasteries, he became the student of both Namkha Palsang and Gorum Kunga Lekpa, receiving from them a treasury of wisdom. He then spent close to five years in strict retreat practicing the six vajra yogas. Following this, he also founded many monasteries such as Mending Monastery near Ngamring in Jang, as well as restoring the great Shangpa master Tangtong Gyalpo's monastery of Chung Riwoche and the hermitage of Mangkar Mugu Lung that had belonged to the famed Drokmi Lotsawa.

While the Jonang tried to distance themselves from political matters, conditions were taking shape that would eventually prove to be unavoidable. While the Phakmodru government was generally supportive of a wide variety of traditions, their power was slowly being degraded by their rivals in Tsang, the Ripung clan. The Ripung were staunch supporters of the Karma Kagyu tradition, so when they succeeded in seizing control of central Tibet, they began to impose a number of restrictions on other traditions such as the Geluk. This led to further polarization within the population and strengthened sectarian divisions.

To counterbalance the growing tensions, some masters chose to accentuate the beneficial qualities of each tradition rather than attempting to prove the supremacy of one over another. Through their nonsectarian and completely unbiased approach, they worked diligently to raise awareness of the unique spiritual legacy each tradition offered while preserving the lineages in danger of being lost or forgotten.

One such master was Palden Kunga Drolchok. Born in the Mustang region of present-day Nepal, Kunga Drolchok was raised within the Sakya tradition. His uncle ordained him as a novice monk and imparted to him all of his knowledge over the course of four

years. In particular, his uncle bestowed on him the empowerments and instructions for the path and its result system of practice.

At the age of thirteen, Kunga Drolchok and his elder brother wandered to the north through Tsang in search of teachings. Eventually, they found their way to Sakya and Serdokchen monasteries. During their stay, the monastery suffered a devastating outbreak of smallpox, killing most of the residing students, including Kunga Drolchok's brother.

Overcome by grief, Kunga Drolchok entered into retreat for the next eight months. Initially, he spent his time memorizing texts until he was visited by Amoghasiddhi, who severely scolded him for not using his time wisely. He was reminded that too much academic scholarship would not lead to enlightenment. In order to achieve realization, he must focus on meditation. Amoghasiddhi gave him many pith instructions, and for the remainder of the retreat, Kunga Drolchok practiced with great diligence.

After emerging from retreat, for the next five years, Kunga Drolchok continued his studies of the path and its result and received teachings at neighboring monasteries such as Ngor and Ngamring. Having developed into an accomplished practitioner, Kunga Drolchok returned to Mustang. He received full ordination from his uncle and many other profound teachings. Soon after, Kunga Drolchok was installed as the new abbot of Pupak Monastery.

The following year, deeply saddened by the death of both his teacher and his father, Kunga Drolchok experienced an intense realization of the impermanence of all phenomena. He was subsequently motivated to abandon his position and enter into the life of a wandering hermit. He inhabited remote places within the Mustang region, occasionally emerging to give teachings in Pupak. When another of his lamas died, Kunga Drolchok assumed responsibility of his lama's monastery for a period of three years, using the time as an opportunity to continue his intensive studies.

At the age of twenty-seven, Kunga Drolchok once again traveled to the north, this time to visit the monasteries of Lhasa in U. Along the way, he was fortunate enough to spend time in the great monastery

of Tsurphu—the monastic seat of the Karmapa—where he received a complete transmission of the many Kagyu lineages. Over the next few years, he traveled back and forth between Mustang and U, gathering teachings that he then practiced in retreat.

Of all the teachings he received, Kunga Drolchok held enormous devotion for those of Khyungpo Naljor and his tradition known as the Shangpa Kagyu. Having originally received these teachings from the master Gyagom Lekpa Gyaltsen, he developed unwavering faith in them after many visionary encounters with the yogini Niguma herself.

For many years, wherever he went, Kunga Drolchok taught the six dharmas of Niguma as well as the path and its result. It is said that he taught the Shangpa teachings more than one hundred times during his life. Eventually, an aspiration to study and practice the six vajra yogas of the *Glorious Kalachakra* began to take hold within him. When he conducted divinations to determine from whom he should receive these teachings, strong indications arose for him to seek out the great Kalachakra master Lochen Ratnabhadra.

After traveling to Jonang, he received all of Ratnabhadra's vast instructions and immediately put them into practice. Under Ratnabhadra's guidance, he was able to achieve an exceptional degree of realization, which strengthened his faith in the vajra yogas.

When the time came to elect a new abbot for Jonang, the names of the candidates were drawn from a hat in front of the Great Stupa of Dolpopa. Three times in a row, Kunga Drolchok's name was selected, clearly identifying him as the next throne holder. Over the course of the next twenty years, Kunga Drolchok gave regular teachings while also spending time writing and meditating in retreat.

It was during this period that Kunga Drolchok collected into a single volume the vast array of teachings he had received over the course of his life—popularly known as Drolchok's quintessential instructions. This was the first time all eight of the great practice lineages[*] were presented side by side, representing the very heart of the different Tibetan traditions. It marked the beginning of a new

genre of unbiased scholarship that would be expanded upon by subsequent masters over the coming centuries.

The unique enhancement offered by this text was the efficient way in which a vast number of lineages could be transmitted within a single sitting. Dispensing with the need to search through many different texts, the teachings became much easier to propagate. It also put into print many pith instructions that had previously gone unrecorded. Both of these features made Kunga Drolchok's work a significant contribution to the preservation of those lineages.

The heart disciple of Kunga Drolchok was Lungrik Gyatso, who had studied primarily in Serdokchen, the monastic seat of the master Shakya Chokden. Spending considerable time wandering the countryside and meditating in remote places, he diligently practiced his principal deity Vajrayogini, who he had met in a dream. He received teachings on the *Kalachakra Tantra* from Kunga Drolchok, who also bestowed on him the complete transmission and extensive teachings he had collected throughout his lifetime. In this way, Lungrik Gyatso became an important lineage holder, not only for the Jonang but also for many of the other traditions in Tsang. It is said the Karmapa and the Sakya throne holders both gave him the title "Treasury of Dharma" in recognition of being a respected master in their lineages. He eventually became the abbot of Cholung Jangtse, the monastery founded by Kunga Drolchok himself.

At this time, the Geluk tradition had seen much of their influence limited under the rule of the Rinpung clan. When the Rinpung were overthrown by the Tsangpa warlord Karma Tseton in a rebellion, this situation worsened considerably. In order to legitimize his power, Karma Tseton began forcibly converting many Geluk monasteries, turning them into Kagyu monasteries. He also began seizing their landholdings, which made it very hard for them to support the thousands of monks under their care. All of this contributed to establishing a deep-seated resentment within the followers of the Geluk, which would appear to inform many of their decisions in the future.

In the midst of such turmoil, a boy was born into the noble family of Ra Lotsawa Dorje Drak. After only a year, the child declared, “I am Kunga Drolchok!” Despite clearly demonstrating the ability to remember his previous life, the status of the boy was kept secret until he was four years old. He was then taken to Cholung Jangtse and presented before Lungrik Gyatso.

There, he was officially enthroned as Drolwe Gonpo, which is translated into Sanskrit as Taranatha—“The Liberating Protector.” The child was immediately given the complete transmission of Kunga Drolchok’s extensive teachings and, under the tutelage of Kunga Drolchok’s disciples, he began his intensive education in the vast treasury of sutra and tantra. This included teachings on the Sakya tradition of path and its result as well as pith instructions for the practice of mahamudra and the six dharmas of both Naropa and Niguma. When he put these instructions into practice, Taranatha experienced the blissful realization of his own primordial awareness.

Kunga Drolchok had appointed his nephew Kunga Palsang as his successor in Jonang, and it is from this master that Taranatha received the Kalachakra commentary and the practice of the dharma protector Six-Armed Mahakala. When he was ready, Lungrik Gyatso bestowed on him all of the necessary empowerments and teachings for the Kalachakra, as well as the unique pith instructions for the six vajra yogas. He also gave teachings on the complete collection of Dolpopa’s writings. Through these practices, Taranatha’s mind blossomed and he attained many great realizations.

By the end of the sixteenth century, due to the increasing popularity of traditions such as Hinduism and Islam, Buddhism had largely become extinct in India. However, a handful of tantric yogis still remained, secretly practicing the teachings of their gurus. Many of these adepts wandered the Indian countryside, eventually making their way into countries where Buddhism still thrived. This was how a fourteen-year-old Taranatha came to meet the great Indian yogi Buddhaguptanatha.

Unlike any yogi Taranatha had ever met, Buddhagupta had completely mastered the practice of extracting the essence and,

therefore, no longer needed to take food or water. As his body emitted immense heat, he wore no clothes even in the biting cold of the Tibetan winters. The list of his miraculous powers was innumerable, and he inspired faith and devotion in all who met him. From this great master, Taranatha received an ocean of teachings never before transmitted in Tibet.

Over the course of his life, he continued to study with many other Indian adepts and scholars (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist). Together, they translated many previously untranslated texts and put great effort into clarifying the teachings. Taranatha represented perhaps the last generation of Tibetan lamas to receive direct teachings from Indian masters.

In 1588, Taranatha was enthroned as the abbot of Jonang. Based on his memories of his previous life as the Indian mahasiddha Nakpopa and the various stories from his guru Buddhagupta, Taranatha went on to write an extensive history of India that has proven to be highly accurate and continues to be used by scholars to this very day.

While residing in Jonang, Taranatha became increasingly aware of the considerable degeneration in people's understanding of Dolpopa's presentation of the Great Middle Way. He believed that, over the years, the introduction of ideas and interpretations by many of the previous Jonang community had resulted in an incomplete comprehension of Dolpopa's intent. In their attempts to reconcile the teachings in their own minds, they had failed to maintain the clear distinctions that Dolpopa had put forward. He feared that, if left in this state, the teachings would only continue to deteriorate further. To prevent these precious teachings from being lost, Taranatha set himself the task of clarifying the philosophy of other-emptiness and, in so doing, reviving Dolpopa's original vision.

Specifically, Dolpopa had gone to great lengths to clearly distinguish the two truths as being separate. In this system, they are not considered two sides of the same coin. If conventional truth is present, then, necessarily, the ultimate truth of buddha nature cannot be manifest. From the perspective of a buddha, conventional

truth does not exist at all. If one perceives conventional truth, then one perceives the dualistic mind and, therefore, one is perceiving ignorance. When individuals hold the view that mere dualistic appearances are the same as ultimate truth, then they have effectively mixed up the two truths and, therefore, lost the view of other-emptiness.

To fix this mistake, Taranatha entered into debate with many of the scholars of his day. Through his endeavors, he found that many misconceptions regarding other-emptiness were preventing practitioners from experiencing the actual truth of the teachings. For example, one commonly held assumption was that the philosophy of other-emptiness was the same as the philosophy of Mind Only and, therefore, the faults of the Mind Only school applied equally to other-emptiness. This shows that they did not understand how to clearly distinguish between consciousness and primordial wisdom as the ultimate ground. Much of Taranatha's writing was devoted to refuting this type of wrong view and establishing a correct understanding of the Great Middle Way.

To aid him in his endeavor, Taranatha's teacher advised him to restore Dolpopa's Great Stupa as a cause for Dolpopa's Dharma to flourish once again. Greatly inspired, Taranatha put enormous effort into returning the stupa to its previous glory. When the restoration was finally complete, he experienced a magnificent vision—the sky filled with enlightened beings, all traveling in a single direction. Following them, he arrived at a red, triangular valley with a great mountain made of crystal rising up from its center. Taranatha could see an infinite number of stupas inside the mountain, and within each of these stupas were an infinite number of buddhas teaching to an infinite number of bodhisattvas. All of the beings were making extensive offerings to this great mountain of stupas. Taranatha realized this was the Dhanyakataka Stupa, where the Buddha had originally taught the *Glorious Kalachakra Tantra*. As his mind filled with the blessings of the teachings, he was convinced the vision was a direct result of all the hard work and determination undertaken to restore the Great Stupa of Jonang.

When fighting erupted between the western clan of Jang and the Tsangpa rulers, hostile armies threatened the very survival of the Jonang Valley. After such great effort to revive Dolpopa's teachings, Taranatha became despondent, believing that at any moment all could be lost. While meditating at the base of the Great Stupa, he developed the desire to remove himself from the turmoil of these worldly problems and go into retreat. At dawn, one of the stupa's statues transformed into Dolpopa himself and told Taranatha not to lose hope and that everything would be all right. If he continued his efforts, he would surely bring great benefit to sentient beings.

The following night, Taranatha again prayed to Dolpopa. This time, he appeared in the form of Dharmodgata and spoke to him four lines of verse, thereby awakening in Taranatha an intense realization of the definitive meaning. In this moment, it is said, he achieved his most profound comprehension of the view of other-emptiness. With all of his doubts cleared away, he composed the text titled *Ornament of Other-Emptiness* as well as a supplementary text presenting many scriptural quotations to support his ideas. From then on, Taranatha frequently met Dolpopa in dreams and as emanations and received teachings from him.

While Taranatha made a considerable contribution to the clarification of the view of other-emptiness, his writings on this subject were minimal compared with the many ritual and practice texts he composed. However astute he was philosophically, Taranatha's main focus was always on practice, emphasizing the need to integrate the teachings through meditative experience. Although he was the abbot of Jonang for many years, apart from the annual teachings he gave, he spent very little time there. Instead, he moved from one monastery to the next, gathering teachings, debating doctrine, bestowing empowerments, and engaging in meditation retreats. To many, he became known simply as Gyalkampa—"The Wanderer."

Like Kunga Drolchok before him, Taranatha was an unbiased master of all traditions and actively worked to preserve and propagate the teachings of the eight great practice lineages. Through

his many years of collecting rare and endangered lineages, Taranatha expanded upon Drolchok's *Quintessential Instructions* and produced the now-famous *One Hundred and Eight Quintessential Instructions of the Jonang*. He also composed a vast number of histories, prayers, and practice manuals as supplements to this collection.

As a result of his writings and due to his central role in the lineages of so many traditions, Taranatha became one of the most highly respected and sought-after masters in Tsang. It is of little surprise that the Tsangpa rulers were eager to count Taranatha as one of their own teachers. In 1615, the Tsangpa leader Karma Phuntsok Namgyal offered Taranatha a piece of land at the end of the Jomonang Valley, as well as extensive offerings in order to build a monastery. Taranatha accepted the offer and began construction of Takten Damcho Ling. Thirteen years later, he performed the consecration of the new monastery and took up residence as its abbot.

Takten Damcho Ling quickly grew into a major institution for Buddhist study and practice, becoming the new heart of the Jonang tradition. Within the walls of this mammoth complex were housed a Buddhist college and meditation retreat facilities, as well as sixteen different temples, including the glorious main hall. Taranatha also built a printing press where he commissioned the carving of new woodblocks for the Kangyur, Tengyur, and other great works of Tibetan masters such as Dolpopa and his disciples. It is believed that over the coming years, many Mongolian students would study in Takten Ling, reinforcing Taranatha's connection with that country.

Meanwhile, in their struggle to maintain control over central Tibet, the Tsangpas were fighting enemies on all fronts. Their campaign to dominate U had led to enormous casualties on both sides, and bearing the brunt of the Tsangpa fury were the monasteries of Sera and Drepung. The Geluk were under attack with few options for their survival.

Recognizing the great toll these wars were having on the people of Tibet and nearing the end of his life, Taranatha became weary and remorseful, knowing such conditions would only bring further pain and misery. One day, in a private discussion with his close disciple

and secret consort, Trinle Wangmo, Taranatha shared two omens he believed indicated the direction the future would take.

The first was the visit of a monk from Drepung Monastery. The monk had pleaded with Taranatha to bring benefit to sentient beings by acting on behalf of the Ganden tradition. On one level, this can be seen as a plea for Taranatha to use his influence with the Tsangpa rulers to ease the persecution of the Geluk monasteries in U. On another level, it was a prophetic sign signifying that Taranatha's future incarnations would come to bring benefit to traditions other than the Jonang.

The second omen occurred when Taranatha received a letter from the administration of Takten Damcho Ling. In Tibet, there were generally three ways a monastery's leadership was selected: from the disciples of the present abbot, from a particular line of reincarnations, or from the bloodline of a given family. In keeping with the Jonang's tradition of the abbot selecting a worthy candidate, it was Taranatha's intention to pass the monastic seat to his closest disciple, Sangye Gyatso. It was stated in the letter, however, that future abbots would be chosen from the hereditary line of Taranatha's family—a convenient change of plan considering the current administration was led by Taranatha's nephew, making him next in the line of succession. Taranatha saw this as a sign that the purity of the lineage of Takten Damcho Ling would soon be broken.

Upon hearing these omens, Trinle Wangmo became dismayed and begged her teacher not to abandon the Jonang. While he acknowledged and cherished her pure devotion, he recognized that events had already been set in motion and, consequently, there was very little he could do to change the outcome. Their collective karma had ripened, meaning the opportunity had already passed. All that could be done was to accept the new situation and make the most of whatever came thereafter.

The Threat of Bias

While it is clear by looking at the history of the Jonang that there is a strong connection with an unbiased approach to practice, we may ask: "Why is this the case and how does it relate to the manifestation of Shambhala?" The answer lies in the fact that bias is synonymous with limitation. Buddha nature is free from all limitations. Therefore, buddha nature is primordially free from all forms of bias.

Understanding this, when practitioners take the four reliances to heart and make the experience of the definitive meaning—the experience of buddha nature—their primary focus, then it becomes necessary to transcend all forms of bias. By releasing the limitations of the conceptual mind, infinite possibilities are free to manifest, and all contradictions disappear because black can be white, self can be other, left can be right. All that seems to be in conflict is finally seen to be in harmony. When this truth is fully realized, then all of the different types of teachings can be seen to be noncontradictory—they can all be integrated into one view in the mind of the practitioner.

This same principle holds true for Shambhala because Shambhala arises from buddha nature. Therefore, the amount of bias present in the mind will directly inhibit how much of Shambhala we are able to experience. As we progress along our spiritual path, we must be conscious of any mind that limits or narrows our perception. When our minds become gripped by sectarianism and fall into extreme views, we need to recognize that we are going in the wrong direction. If, on the other hand, we find our minds becoming more open to possibilities and tolerant of diversity, then we can be confident that we are on the right path.

By rooting itself in this unbiased philosophy, the Jonang tradition has been able to maintain the purity of its teachings in the face of extreme adversity. While, at one time, it was believed by some that the Jonang had disappeared completely, this idea could not be further from the truth. As we will see, the Jonang tradition has indeed survived to this day and is currently flourishing in the eastern regions of Tibet. This fact means that right now the unbroken lineage of Shambhala is still accessible to us, and thus it is possible to follow

in the footsteps of these incredible masters and actualize the path just as they did.

SKIP NOTES

* The eight great practice lineages are: (1) the teachings of the Nyingma, (2) the teachings of the Kadam, (3) the teachings of the path and its result, (4) the teachings of the Marpa Kagyu (5) the teachings of the Shangpa Kagyu (6) the teachings of the six vajra yogas, (7) the teachings of pacification and severance, and (8) the teachings of approach and accomplishment.

Appendix 4: The Eastern Tradition of Dzamthang

During the fourteenth century, under the brilliant leadership of Dolpopa, the Jonang tradition had grown significantly and was attracting followers from far and wide. One such figure was Minyak Lodro Drakpa from the eastern region of Kham. Lodro Drakpa had specifically traveled from Minyak to Jonang in order to study with Dolpopa, staying with him for six years before returning to the Kham region. He went on to travel throughout Amdo and Kham, giving teachings and establishing many monasteries and hermitages. While most of these monasteries have since been absorbed into other traditions, Lodro Drakpa was still instrumental in bringing the view of other-emptiness into the east and establishing important seeds that would be ripened by others.

The second wave of expansion came in 1425 when the Jonang master Ratnashri founded the famed Choje Monastery in Dzamthang. Born in the Gyalrong region of Amdo, Ratnashri began his studies at a very early age, seeking out the teachings of the famed yogi Ripa Sherab Pal. After receiving novice ordination and many foundational teachings, Ratnashri traveled west to the Tsang region in order to study the sutras and tantras with many of the great masters of his time. Among his teachers were many of Dolpopa's heart disciples, including Sabsang Mati Panchen, Jonang Chokle Namgyal, Tsechen Nyabon Kunga, and others. Under their guidance, he became a great scholar and proponent of the view of other-

emptiness. He also received extensive instructions in the six vajra yogas and various tantric rituals.

After twelve years in Tsang, Ratnashri was informed by Chokle Namgyal that it was time for him to return east in order to uphold a prophecy told to him by Dolpopa. Ratnashri was told to place a dharma conch and stupa on the back of a donkey and travel east through the Kham and Amdo regions. When the donkey lay down and the conch shell sounded, he was to establish a monastery in that exact location. While it pained Ratnashri to be separated from his teachers, he did as Chokle Namgyal requested and set out on his journey.

Ratnashri traveled to Kham via Upper Tibet, passing first through Ngari in the west and then east into Amdo, followed by a southerly direction into Kham. Along the way, he established several monasteries such as Ngari Chozong, but it was not until he reached the Dzamthang valley that the prophecy was finally fulfilled. As he traveled, Ratnashri recited the *Litany of the Names of Manjushri.* As he spoke the line, "This is an excellent establishment for the Victory Banner of the Dharma!" the conch sounded.

When Ratnashri took steps to begin building, he became aware of a Bon monastery also residing in the valley. While it is unclear how events transpired, Ratnashri is believed to have sent a gift of shoes to the Bon and in return he was given a gift of a white cushion. This was taken as a sign that the Bon would leave the valley and the Jonang would take root in Dzamthang. Hence, Choje Monastic Residence was successfully founded by Ratnashri and quickly became a thriving community of scholar-practitioners.

It is important at this point to note that, politically, the Dzamthang region fell under the protection of the Ming Dynasty of China and not the Phakmodru of U-Tsang. While, traditionally, the area was considered a part of Kham, due to the close ties between the Karmapa and the Ming emperor, the Chinese had pledged their military and political support to the loose collection of kingdoms within that region. This meant that Kham was largely isolated from the ongoing power struggles that would play out later in U and Tsang

—a fact that would prove to be instrumental in the future preservation of the Jonang tradition.

Under the skillful guidance of Ratnashri, Choje was growing at a rapid pace. Soon, the existing monastery needed to expand, as it could no longer support the influx of monks arriving from all over to study and practice the Jonang Dharma. In 1462, one of Ratnashri's closest disciples, Rinchen Drakpa, founded Tsechu Monastery. Flourishing under Rinchen Drakpa's leadership, Tsechu became the second most important Jonang institution in the region. It is said that, over time, Choje and Tsechu had easily more than ten thousand monks following the teachings of Dolpopa and his disciples.

After his passing, Ratnashri's first reincarnation was recognized in Gyalwa Rinchen Sangpo. Born in the region of Gyalrong, he quickly became an accomplished master of Kalachakra and was enthroned in Choje as Ratnashri's successor, where most people referred to him as Gyalwa Sang. He is most known for training large numbers of scholars and sending them into the surrounding regions to establish branch monasteries. As a result of their efforts, over 108 Jonang monasteries were founded in the Gyalrong region alone. Gyalwa Sang himself is said to have founded five monasteries near his birthplace, where he spent much of the remainder of his life in retreat.

Sometime after Gyalwa Sang's death, a boy was born into the family line of the great Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. The boy's name was Paljor Sangpo, and, from a very early age, he began practicing the Tantra Vehicle, experiencing visions of Padmasambhava and other deities. When he was ten years old, he took novice ordination at Tsechu Monastery where he was recognized by Rinchen Drakpa as being the reincarnation of Gyalwa Sang. Soon after, he was enthroned as the regent of Choje Monastery.

Paljor Sangpo dedicated himself to many years of study and practice of the Kalachakra under various tutors. By the time he was twenty-three, he had become a learned master able to recite the *Stainless Light* commentary once every day from start to finish.

Following his studies, he traveled throughout the region, meditating in caves and other remote sites, during which time he developed remarkable abilities such as leaving impressions in solid rock. On one occasion, he prevented an outbreak of war by magically emanating in the sky riding a lion.

As word of his realizations spread throughout the land, Paljor Sangpo began to attract many high-profile students such as the fifth Karmapa, Deshin Shekpa. Due to the Karmapa being the principal teacher of the Ming emperor Gongma Taming, it was not long before Paljor Sangpo was invited to Beijing to give teachings. Traveling to China, he gave extensive teachings to the royal court, establishing a patron-priest relationship between Dzamthang and the Chinese emperor. This support was one of the reasons why the Jonang were able to expand so rapidly, establishing more than four hundred monasteries in the region and completely transforming the spiritual landscapes of both Amdo and Kham.

The Crisis in Central Tibet

By 1621, the Tsangpa lords had completely dominated Lhasa and the surrounding regions. Fearing for their survival, the Geluk sent emissaries to their Mongolian allies requesting military support. In the end, it was Gushri Khan who answered the call and was able to expel the Tsangpas and their allies. At that time, the Mongolian leader officially enthroned the Fifth Dalai Lama as the supreme leader of Tibet, thus establishing the Geluk in the seat of power in the region.

To further cement this power, Gushri Khan began a bloody campaign to wipe out any resistance to the new government. He started by sweeping through the eastern kingdoms of Kham and then setting his sights on Tsang. After more than two decades of war, they finally brought an end to the Tsangpa Dynasty when they took control of Shigatse. In this way, U, Tsang, and Kham were all united under Mongolian rule.

While the Mongolians maintained a sizable force in Tibet, the administration of the country was left to the newly formed government—the famed Ganden Palace. Unfortunately, the new governors proved to be just as unforgiving as their persecutors, and, in order to establish their own power base, the central government began a campaign of forcibly converting the monasteries of their rivals and seizing control of their land.

As the Kagyu tradition had been so strongly supported by the Tsangpa, they were singled out and targeted by Lhasa. The tenth Karmapa was forced into exile, taking refuge in parts of Amdo, Kham, and Bhutan. Many of his monasteries were converted and the Karma Kagyu presence in U-Tsang became almost nonexistent.

Elsewhere, a similar fate was playing out for the Jonang. With the death of Taranatha in 1635, the Ganden Palace issued a decree forbidding the recognition of his reincarnation within the borders of Tibet. This established the conditions for a future declaration that he had been reborn in Mongolia, where he came to be known as Jetsun Dampa Rinpoche.

According to the government, Taranatha was believed to have spent the last twenty years of his life traveling through Mongolia. This was one reason used to explain why he chose to reincarnate in that region. It was also said that Jetsun Dampa was a reincarnation of Jamyang Choje, the founder of Drepung Monastery, who was known for having a view of other-emptiness. These links helped the government to establish a strong link between Taranatha and the Geluk tradition, which superseded his involvement with the Jonang.

Following Taranatha's death, his disciple Sangye Gyatso assumed the Jonang throne but passed away almost immediately afterward. The monastic seat was then bestowed on Kunga Rinchen Gyatso, one of Taranatha's principal students. He had received extensive teachings from Taranatha on the *Kalachakra Tantra* as well as the complete pith instructions for the six vajra yogas. Known for his remarkable intelligence, Rinchen Gyatso could memorize thirty-six pages of text each day. He remained abbot of Takten Damcho Ling for approximately fifteen years.

In 1650, at the urging of the newly recognized Dampa Rinpoche and with the support of the high Geluk lamas, the government took steps to have Takten Damcho Ling converted into a Geluk monastery. First, the teachings of Taranatha and Dolpopa were labeled as heretical and the printing presses were sealed. Then, a new teaching institute was established for the study of the Geluk doctrine. The monks were then empowered into the Geluk systems of practice and the recitation of Geluk prayers began. Even though they were prohibited from propagating the Jonang teachings, the monks refused to adopt the new curriculum and, subsequently, many left the monastery. Rinchen Gyatso himself chose to go into retreat in the hermitages of the Jomonang Valley. Those who chose to remain continued as best they could to practice the teachings they had previously received. By the year 1658, Takten Damcho Ling was officially renamed Ganden Phuntsok Ling.

In a little more than a few decades, Takten Ling had been transformed from a shining star of the Jonang tradition into a shadow of its former glory. With the loss of its main institution, many of the surrounding monasteries of U and Tsang slowly began to follow suit. In time, the Jonang presence in central Tibet would be completely wiped out. And yet, no matter how much the Geluk restricted the external activities of the Jonang practitioners, they couldn't shake their faith in Shambhala and the teachings of definitive meaning. Fortunately, this was not the end of the Jonang Dharma, as the monasteries of the east had remained largely untouched by the fighting. Safe behind the protection of the Ming emperor, the Jonang of Amdo and Kham continued to flourish. As the conditions steadily deteriorated in Tsang, many of Taranatha's students began to consider their options.

Lodro Namgyal met Taranatha when he was sixteen and spent as much time as he could learning about sutra and tantra. While Taranatha had given him novice ordination, it was Rinchen Gyatso who made him a fully ordained monk. Under Rinchen Gyatso's guidance, Lodro Namgyal became an expert in the practice of Kalachakra and philosophy of other-emptiness.

As the situation became increasingly tense in Takten Ling, Lodro Namgyal traveled to Tashi Lhunpo to receive teachings from the Geluk master, the first Panchen Lama. He then traveled to Lhasa where he met with the Fifth Dalai Lama and had a long discussion about Kalachakra and the view of other-emptiness. It is said that the Dalai Lama was very impressed by Lodro Namgyal's knowledge.

After this meeting, it became clear to Lodro Namgyal that the future of the Jonang in U-Tsang did not look bright. He began to seriously reflect on how to safeguard the tradition from the uncertainty that lay ahead. Over the next few years, he weighed his options but was unable to come to any strong conclusion. It wasn't until he experienced three very powerful visions that he was motivated to take action.

The first vision came in the form of White Tara. She told him that he would encounter a mountain shaped like the body of Dzambhala (a deity often linked to great prosperity), and there he would find a monastery. She urged him to seek out this monastery in the region of Dzamthang.

The second vision came while Lodro Namgyal was conducting an intensive meditation retreat at the hermitage just above the Great Stupa. In this vision, he saw the clear form of Dolpopa, who told him that his karmic destiny lay to the east. Lodro Namgyal disregarded the vision, however, thinking of it simply as an appearance arising from his meditation practice.

Finally, the third vision occurred when he saw the form of a protector deity who told him he must travel to Kham. This time, Lodro Namgyal went to consult with Trinle Wangmo in her retreat center. Based on the reality of their situation, they both agreed it would be beneficial for him to travel eastward. With his mind made up, Lodro Namgyal made extensive offerings at the Great Stupa and set out on his journey.

He first traveled to Tashi Lhunpo and then to Lhasa, where he visited Drepung Monastery and stayed for a year. In the summer of 1657, he made his way eastward into Kham. At the same time as Takten Ling was officially converted, Lodro Namgyal inaugurated the

new Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery, named after the ancestral homeland of their tradition. He then gave the Kalachakra empowerment and performed more than fifty ordination ceremonies, establishing a large monastic community. Under the sponsorship of a local king in Gyalrong, Lodro Namgyal traveled throughout Amdo, giving many teachings. He stayed there for twelve years before eventually returning to central Tibet via Mongolia.

While the founding of Tsangwa Monastery marked the beginning of a Jonang exodus from U-Tsang, it would still take several generations for others to follow his lead. The life of Lodro Namgyal's nephew Ngawang Trinle was a good example of how this transition unfolded. When he was sixteen, he took ordination with his uncle and began his studies in Chalung Monastery. Over the next four years, he developed an extensive knowledge of philosophy, epistemology, and monastic discipline. He also received many teachings on the Kalachakra six yogas from Lodro Namgyal. After completing his studies, he conducted his exams in the presence of the Fifth Dalai Lama (as was then the custom).

When he was given the opportunity to teach in Dzamthang, he declined the offer out of respect for his parents who discouraged him from leaving. However, after his uncle passed away and Takten Ling was officially converted, Ngawang Trinle decided to take on the life of a wandering hermit. For the next six years, while he gave a number of teachings in different Jonang monasteries, he primarily focused on practicing the six vajra yogas in the remote hermitages. After emerging from retreat, he taught for four years.

During this period, Ngawang Trinle had become well known for his nonsectarian view. Having practiced a variety of systems, he was well respected by the Geluk, Sakya, Drukpa, Kagyu, and Jonang. In 1707, he was offered the monastic seat of Chalung Dorje Drak, where he established a school for the dedicated practice of the six vajra yogas in accordance with the Jonang tradition. He also went on to successfully introduce many Jonang teachings into the Geluk curriculums at both Drepung and Ganden. This is an important indication that many Gelukpa were starting to open up to the

teachings of other traditions, following in the footsteps of the Fifth Dalai Lama who had studied extensively with the Nyingma and Sakya. It seems that with the threats to their power effectively removed, the followers of the Geluk were once again free to focus on spiritual matters.

Then, in 1717, Ngawang Trinle was again invited to Tsangwa in Dzamthang. This time he accepted their offer and took up residence for a number of years. While staying there, he attracted a great number of students to the monastery and gave many teachings in Dzamthang and the surrounding areas. In addition to his activities at Tsangwa, Ngawang Trinle established many monasteries in the Amdo Ngawa and Gyalrong regions.

In the final years of his life, at the invitation of Lhazang Khan, he traveled to Mongolia where he gave extensive teachings and gathered many students. Due to fighting between various Mongolian factions, he was unable to return to Tibet and so stayed in Mongolia for another year establishing a number of monastic colleges. Eventually, when the danger had subsided, he made his way back to Tsang, where he lived out the rest of his days teaching in Tashi Lhunpo and transmitting the Jonang teachings to the Mongolian chief Tsetan Dorje.

Following the lead of such great masters as Lodro Namgyal and Ngawang Trinle, the vast majority of the Jonang monks in U-Tsang decided they would be better off making the move to Amdo and Kham. With the influx of monks flowing into the region, a number of new monasteries were founded. In 1614, Lama Setsang, a descendant of the famous Gar clan and direct disciple of Taranatha, founded Se Monastery in the Amdo Ngawa region. Then, in 1657, Lodro Namgyal's student Kunga Palsang founded Drokke Samdup Monastery. Both of these monasteries were of particular importance, as they would soon grow to become major centers for the transmission and practice of the Jonang Dharma.

A Safe Haven for the Jonang

Prior to the Mongolian invasion and the establishment of the Ganden Palace in Lhasa, the various dynasties of central Tibet had largely been autonomous and independent. Despite chaotic internal conflict, Tibet had enjoyed relative stability with its neighbors; this was mostly due to their relationship with the Mongolian Khans and Chinese emperors. While the Tibetan lamas offered spiritual advice, the foreign rulers provided Tibet with financial support and political protection when needed. This priest-patron relationship was traditionally symbolic in nature and allowed Tibetans to freely manage their own affairs as they saw fit.

After the invasion of Gushri Khan, however, this relationship took on a decidedly military tone. Having no army of its own, the government of the Ganden Palace relied heavily on the Mongolians to enforce their laws and protect the regime from their enemies, both internally and externally. This led to a constant presence of foreign troops active within the borders of Tibet—a pattern that has persisted in various forms up to the present day. For better or worse, the fate of U-Tsang had then become closely entangled with the ambitions of foreign powers.

In the meantime, a different story was taking place in the border kingdoms of eastern Tibet. Physically divided by natural boundaries, central and eastern Tibet had developed in relative isolation from each other. The remote villages and monasteries of the east continued to operate within the jurisdiction of the local warlords who dominated the region. In this harsh and remote landscape, there was no centralized government to impose a single code of law, and so each kingdom, clan, or tribe was responsible for managing its own affairs. Mostly undisturbed by the political upheavals in Lhasa and in spite of the foreign empire that claimed sovereignty over their lands, life for the people of the east continued as it had for thousands of years.

As the country moved into the eighteenth century, the relationship between central and eastern Tibet would continue to follow separate narratives. The different political environments of the two regions would prove to be instrumental in shaping the history of the Jonang

tradition, whose ties to central Tibet had been almost completely severed by the sectarian rivalries of their past.

In China, the Ming Dynasty eventually gave way to the Qing Dynasty. Under the leadership of their new emperor, the western borders were strengthened as a precautionary measure against what was seen as potential Mongolian threats. Specifically, during the 1720s, the Qing army was sent into Amdo and eastern Kham to drive out the Mongolian tribes and assert their dominance in the region. By the end of the decade, they had effectively established two new provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan.

For the most part, China seemed more interested in the strategic value of these areas and left the actual administration of the regions to local chieftains. This meant that over the course of the next hundred years, Tibetan monasteries in the provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan were generally free to focus their energy on spiritual practice rather than becoming involved in large scale political conflicts. This relative safety and freedom created the perfect conditions for the Jonang from Tsang to regroup and reestablish their monastic institutions.

In the seventeenth century, Lodro Namgyal had created a connection between the central and eastern Jonang. Ngawang Trinle went on to strengthen that bond, creating the momentum for Tsangwa Monastery to grow. However, the monastery would not come into its own until the eighteenth century, when under the leadership of a series of truly extraordinary vajra masters, the community was nurtured and the practice of the six vajra yogas was fully established.

When Taranatha had originally given Lodro Namgyal ordination in Takten Damcho Ling, he gave him a blessing cord with three colored strands intertwined together and prophesied that three bodhisattvas would be born into his line of incarnations. Of these three, the first was Ngawang Tenzin Namgyal. Growing up in Tsang, Tenzin Namgyal received many teachings from Ngawang Trinle. At the age of ten, he obtained the pith instructions for the six vajra yogas and immediately went into a short but intensive retreat for two weeks. He

received ordination at the age of sixteen and continued his studies under many masters such as the Panchen Lama Lobsang Yeshe and Choje Kunsang Wangpo.

At the invitation of the Dzamthang Choje Gyalwa Lhundrup, Tenzin Namgyal accepted the position of vajra master at Tsangwa Monastery and began his journey eastward, traveling into Amdo, then continuing south toward Dzamthang. On his way, he passed through the Akyong kingdom where he gave fifteen days of teachings to King Akyong Tenzin Darge. It was at this time that Yarthang Monastery was founded. It had originally been a Nyingma monastery but was gifted to the Jonang by the king and the Nyingma abbot Domtsha Lama Kunga. Yarthang became the first Jonang monastery to be established in the remote region of Golok.

When Tenzin Namgyal finally arrived in Dzamthang, all of the local deities and spirits were said to have gathered to welcome him and pledge their service to the Dharma. The entire community performed an elaborate welcome ceremony in which the abbot of Choje even offered his own home to the master. Over the course of the next few years, Tenzin Namgyal bestowed all of the Kalachakra empowerments, gave extensive teachings on the Kalachakra commentary, and guided the students in their practice of the six yogas.

With Dzamthang as his base, Tenzin Namgyal toured the surrounding regions imparting many teachings and inspiring enormous faith in the Jonang Dharma. As his extensive travels took him all over Amdo Ngawa, Tsako, and Takhu, he gathered many new students and accumulated vast amounts of offerings. He distributed this wealth wherever it was needed, especially sending it to the monks remaining in U-Tsang.

Tenzin Namgyal's fame spread quickly throughout the region, prompting many kings to invite him to visit their lands. During his teachings, he would often perform magical displays such as controlling fire and causing water to boil spontaneously as a means to inspire faith in the students. When war broke out between two rival kings, it was Tenzin Namgyal they turned to as mediator for the

conflict. Even though he did not want to be involved in such worldly affairs, he, nonetheless, agreed to help. Regrettably, however, his life was ended when one of those kings poisoned his food.

Following Tenzin Namgyal's passing, his regent Ngawang Khetsun Dargye assumed the role of vajra master in Tsangwa. Khetsun Dargye was a perfect role model, displaying pristine moral discipline, a vast knowledge of the scriptures, and profound wisdom stemming from his extensive practice. After spending considerable time meditating in his mountain hermitage, Khetsun Dargye was offered by the local community a blessed site on which to build a new monastery. It was said to be the place where a renowned yogi had given many teachings on the profound six yogas of Kalachakra. While meditating there, he had seen a host of buddhas and pure realms. The Tsinang Monastery was thus founded, greatly strengthening the Jonang presence in Golok and Amdo Ngawa.

It is believed that Kunsang Trinle Namgyal was the second bodhisattva incarnation of the great Kalachakra master Lodro Namgyal. From a very young age, he received many teachings from an array of highly realized lamas, especially his root teacher, Ngawang Khetsun Dargye. In Tsangwa Monastery, he was given all of the empowerments, transmissions, and instructions on the glorious practices of Kalachakra. Treasuring these precious teachings, he diligently put them into practice and attained many realizations. As fame of his accomplishments spread, Trinle Namgyal attracted an ocean of followers from all over Amdo and Kham. Even great masters such as the thirteenth Karmapa, Dudul Dorje, traveled great distances to receive teachings from him.

Kunsang Trinle Namgyal's regent was the highly accomplished yogi Nuden Lhundrub Gyatso. Particularly famous for his mastery of the inner heat known as *tummo,* he had attained a power that was both fierce and unconquerable. Apparently, all the demons and gods in the region came under his control and were brought to serve the Buddha's Dharma. In the Yuk Valley, he established the monastery of Lower Tsangwa where he, with the help of Ngawang Trinle's

reincarnation, Jigme Gyatso, performed many great deeds for the benefit of sentient beings.

Following Lhundrub Gyatso was the third incarnation of Lodro Namgyal, the great vajra master Konchok Jigme Namgyal. Born in the Markok valley, he was mainly educated at Dzamthang Tsangwa under the guidance of Lama Lhatse Gyaltsen and Lhundrub Gyatso. After he had received many extensive teachings, he traveled to the Jonang Valley and conducted a strict retreat in a hermitage there. In addition to his main practice of the Kalachakra vajra yogas, Jigme Namgyal also obtained teachings and empowerments in the six dharmas of Niguma. Due to his diligent practice, he became a fully qualified Kalachakra master. When he finally returned to Dzamthang Tsangwa, he assumed the vajra throne and became the main lineage holder of the Jonang tradition.

The Nonsectarian Movement of the East

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Mongolian presence in Tibet had significantly declined and the government of central Tibet was now heavily reliant on the Qing emperor for military protection. When the Nepali army attempted to invade Tibet from the south, it was the Qing forces that were called upon to push them back. However, due to the ongoing incursions, the Qing emperor decided to send more troops into the region and assert a greater presence on the southern border.

With the Qing emperor as their ally, the Geluk tradition was now firmly established in all parts of central Tibet. While there were still small pockets of followers from other traditions, most had either been converted or had fled during the many years of sectarian fighting. As mentioned previously, many of those fleeing sought refuge in Amdo and Kham, where the great number of independent kingdoms had encouraged a richer diversity of traditions. Eager to preserve their teachings and practices (many of which were on the

verge of extinction), some of the great lamas began to once again emphasize a nonsectarian approach.

Following in the footsteps of great pioneers such as Kunga Drolchok and Taranatha, the Sakya lama Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and the Kagyu lama Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye were largely responsible for popularizing a nonsectarian movement in the east. For much of the nineteenth century, they actively championed against biased notions that pitted one tradition against the next. They effectively taught a whole generation of students to cherish the spiritual legacy of their country and to respect each other's views as powerful and unique methods for overcoming ignorance.

While Khyentse Wangpo was largely focused on collecting lineages and transmitting them to his disciples, Jamgon Kongtrul dedicated much of his life to compiling those teachings into various encyclopedic texts known as the five great treasuries.* Within his vast writings, Kongtrul pays particular homage to Taranatha, citing him as a major source of inspiration and even claiming in his autobiography to be his reincarnation. It is perhaps this strong connection with the Jonang that motivated Kongtrul to travel to Dzamthang and study under the Tsangwa Lama Ngawang Chophel Gyatso.

Born in the Zuka region, Chophel Gyatso grew up longing to study and practice in Dzamthang Monastery. When he was ten, he ran away from his family to become a monk in Tsangwa. He studied for many years, eventually receiving all of the Kalachakra teachings from his master Lama Ngawang Gyaltsen. Chophel Gyatso spent three years in strict retreat practicing the first two vajra yogas, followed by extensive study and practice within a variety of different traditions. He was known to have a particularly strong connection with the Nyingma teachings of Dzogchen and the Shangpa teachings of Niguma.

As Chophel Gyatso proved himself to be a highly accomplished practitioner, he was chosen as a touring lama for Tsangwa Monastery, which mostly entailed traveling the countryside, performing rituals and giving many teachings on behalf of the

Tsangwa monks. Through his efforts, he brought great benefit to the communities he visited and raised considerable resources for the expansion of the temples in Dzamthang.

When he was fifty years old, Jigme Namgyal chose Chophel Gyatso as his successor as vajra master of Dzamthang Tsangwa. From then on, he gave countless empowerments, transmissions, and instructions to the monastic community. It was during this period that Jamgon Kongtrul arrived in Dzamthang and received many teachings from Chophel Gyatso on the subjects of the Great Middle Way, Guhyasamaja, Chod, and of course the six yogas of Kalachakra. The two formed a strong bond of mutual respect and devotion.

In the coming years, Chophel Gyatso was invited to the Ngawa region by the local king and taught in many monasteries from each of the main traditions, becoming famous as an accomplished nonsectarian practitioner. Following this, he gave the teachings of Niguma to the great Nyingma lama Patrul Rinpoche and bestowed the six vajra yogas on the Drukpa Kagyu lama Shichen Bairochana. Near the end of his life, he also gave many teachings in the Kagyu monastery of Yutok. In this way, he spent his life working tirelessly for the benefit of all sentient beings, regardless of their spiritual beliefs. Chophel Gyatso was succeeded by three heart disciples: Ngawang Chokyi Phakpa, Ngawang Chojor Gyatso, and Ngawang Chozin Gyatso.

Ordained by Jigme Namgyal when he was only seven years old, Ngawang Chokyi Phakpa dedicated himself to the study and practice of Dharma from a very early age. By the time he was twenty-five, Chokyi Phakpa had studied over one hundred mandalas from different systems of tantra and was able to clearly visualize each with an astonishing degree of detail. This made him one of the most sought-after ritual masters in all of the Jonang monasteries.

Having received many teachings from Jamgon Kongtrul, Patrul Rinpoche, and Yutok Karma, Chokyi Phakpa became well versed in distinguishing the practices of all the major traditions. After putting these teachings into practice, he experienced many visions. Once, while practicing Kalachakra, he saw Kalki Pundarika in the form of

Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen. On another occasion, while practicing Hayagriva, he experienced the pure land of Sukhavati. He would often have visions of Shambhala, particularly of a man wearing a white crown who revealed many hidden phenomena to him.

Shortly after Chophel Gyatso passed away, Chokyi Phakpa had an intense dream. His lama appeared in the sky, singing a profound song of Dharma that bestowed upon him many teachings and blessings. From that point on, huge numbers of people would travel from all over the region to request teachings from Chokyi Phakpa. However, as he was very strict regarding who he taught, he did not accept many students.

When the man wearing the white crown appeared to him again in another vision, he told Chokyi Phakpa that he was not teaching enough people. As a result of this dream, he lifted his restrictions and began to teach more openly. As Chokyi Phakpa gave many empowerments and teachings to the monks in the region, he received abundant offerings that he used to build a great prayer hall for the monastery in Dzamthang.

In 1878, as Chokyi Phakpa neared the end of his life, he told his followers, “This year, I am going to die. You must practice purely, ethically, and with great discipline. Never contaminate the pure tradition of this Jonang Dharma with self-pride or laziness. I have never broken nor caused to decline any of my vows, and, for some time, I have abided free from all dualistic perception. For me, the cycles of night and day have become one. I am always filled with the spontaneously arisen mind of clear light.” Soon after this, he passed away.

Chokyi Phakpa’s successor was his Dharma brother Ngawang Chojor Gyatso. Like Chokyi Phakpa, he had also been a close student of Chophel Gyatso. From the age of thirteen, Chojor Gyatso had received extensive instructions for practicing the six vajra yogas and the six dharmas of Niguma. It is said that when he received these teachings, he experienced extraordinarily pure perception and was able to see his master as inseparable from Dolpopa. His mind was

greatly inspired by this, and he spent time abiding in an immutable nondual absorption.

When Chojor Gyatso entered into strict retreat on the vajra yogas, he had many profound realizations. Not only did he gain complete control over innumerable manifestations of empty forms, but he was also able to tame the circulation of his subtle essences and winds. As a result, he began to experience all of reality as a manifestation of infinite pure realms and deities of different shapes and colors. Eventually, Chojor Gyatso integrated all of these experiences to attain a direct realization of the ultimate nature of reality. Then, meditating on the six dharmas of Niguma, he awakened many magical powers by mastering the practices of clear light and dream yoga.

At the age of forty-five, after becoming a highly realized yogi, Chojor Gyatso was chosen to take up the position of vajra master at Tsangwa Monastery. For the rest of his life, he gave teachings continuously to the thousands of monks who resided in Dzamthang. Most of his time was dedicated to upholding the Kalachakra lineage as it had been passed down since the time of the Buddha, thereby preserving the purity of the Jonang Dharma. In the year 1910, he passed away after manifesting signs of sickness.

Of all the students of Chophel Gyatso, Ngawang Chozin Gyatso was perhaps the most well known for his remarkable accomplishments as a tantric yogi. Believed to be an emanation of the bodhisattva Akashagarbha and the reincarnation of Dolpopa's student, Kunpang Chodrak Pal, he developed many powers that would inspire countless students to practice the six vajra yogas.

Born in the village of Washul, just down the valley from Dzamathang, he was originally tutored by his uncle until he was old enough to go to Tsangwa Monastery. When he first met Chophel Gyatso, he had such an immense feeling of respect and devotion for this great master that he instantly offered himself as a disciple. He was then given all the preliminary teachings and pith instructions for the vajra yogas, as well as the name of Ngawang Chozin Gyatso.

Entering into retreat, Chozin Gyatso immediately developed the realizations according to each phase of the six yogas. Through the first two yogas, he completely mixed his perception with the ten signs of empty form. From that moment on, he experienced no difference between the meditative and nonmeditative states. As he practiced the third and fourth yogas, he completely tamed his winds and subtle essences, which allowed him to walk through walls and to jump high into the air while sitting with his legs crossed. Through the fifth yoga, he directly experienced the Sublime Realm of Shambhala and often traveled there to receive instruction. On one such visit, he received instruction on a number of new postures that proved to be so effective that they became widely used in all the monasteries as part of the tradition.

When Chozin Gyatso practiced the sixth yoga, his mind became completely absorbed into primordial clear light. Knowing that if Chozin Gyatso continued with this practice he would dissolve into the pure realm forever, Chophel Gyatso used his own psychic powers to draw his disciple back into his body. Chozin Gyatso apparently told his vajra brothers that he was very disappointed he could not stay in this pure realm. His master then persuaded him to focus more on external aspects such as calligraphy, astrology, and art to help him remain anchored to this world. Despite this advice, he still achieved mastery of the six yogas as well as practicing a wide variety of other systems of highest yoga tantra.

After receiving a prophecy that he would have the great fortune to meet an exceptional lama wearing white robes and a red meditation sash, Chozin Gyatso sought out the Nyingma lama known as Lhatse Kyabgon. From this master he received many teachings, but in particular the profound practice of object severance. A major part of this practice was to travel to haunted grounds and mentally offer one’s body to the demons and spirits that resided there. It was said that when Chozin Gyatso engaged in this practice, people nearby heard many strange and terrifying noises. Often they became so frightened that they ran away.

During much of his life, Chozin Gyatso traveled throughout Amdo and Kham on behalf of Tsangwa Monastery, performing many miracles to benefit the sick or injured. Through the power of his clairvoyance, he could arrive just in time to perform the rituals for transferring a newly deceased consciousness to a pure realm. Due to the fame of his amazing powers, Chozin Gyatso became a much sought-after master by everyone, regardless of their status.

After completing his duties on behalf of Tsangwa, his focus shifted to passing on the profound instructions he had received. He went into retreat in a small hermitage above Washul village known as Kari Ritro, and there taught a small selection of very fortunate students the generation- and completion-stage practices of the Kalachakra and Shangpa systems. All of his disciples attained great accomplishments in their practice and developed unwavering faith and devotion toward their master. It is believed that through the power of their devotion, they each experienced an ocean of knowledge and realization, even though many had not studied formally.

When Chozin Gyatso gave empowerments or engaged in any generation-stage practice, he would often manifest to his students as the yidam deity. For instance, when practicing Vajrayogini, they would see him in the actual form of Vajrayogini. Likewise, when he practiced the wrathful Yamantaka, he would emanate countless forms in all of the ten directions. Many of his disciples reported perceiving truly amazing things when they were with Chozin Gyatso.

During his life, Chozin Gyatso was known to constantly recite the *Litany of Manjushri's Names* and to have recited both the Kalachakra and Chakrasamvara mantras more than five million times. He composed a wealth of prayers and practice manuals, along with many extensive commentaries, greatly increasing the number of people practicing the six vajra yogas.

When he was seventy-five, having completed much of his life's work, Chozin Gyatso began to communicate less with people and slipped into a state of perpetual realization in which he ceased to differentiate between this world and the higher realms. Many saw

these aspects as signs of preparation for his death, and so his students made heartfelt requests for him to stay.

Granting their request, he sat erect and completely still for three years. He often went for days without drinking or eating. When his students begged him to eat something, he would consume huge amounts of food, and yet no matter how much he ate, he never produced a single drop of waste. During this time, even though his behavior was both unusual and unpredictable, the occasional guidance he would give his students was always inspiring and filled with great meaning.

As the time of his death approached, Chozin Gyatso's breath became very long, with greater delays between the inhalation and exhalation. He persisted in this way for several weeks until he was ready to die. When his nephew found him, he was sitting in the meditation posture with his eyes gazing upward. Unable to bear the loss of his teacher, he begged him to eat his breakfast. Chozin Gyatso became very wrathful and scolded his nephew for interrupting him. Soon after that, he told him not to worry and laid down on his side. Chozin Gyatso's mind then became inseparable from the clear light of death, completely merging with the nature of reality.

It was later revealed that when Chozin Gyatso had been sitting erect, he was directing his mind into a mindstream in a womb. Unfortunately, because his nephew had interrupted the process, he was unable to achieve the desired result. Nevertheless, following his death, there were many miraculous occurrences. In particular, after his cremation, when the stupa was opened to retrieve any relics left behind, they found two sets of skeletons, one male and one female. This remarkable sign indicated that Chozin Gyatso had achieved the union of Kalachakra and Vishvamata.

Revival of Jonang Scholarship

After the period of crisis in central Tibet, as a tradition, the Jonang had distanced themselves from focusing on study and philosophical

debate. Their curriculum had become much more experiential in nature, emphasizing a nonconceptual approach that primarily relied on the power of devotion and meditation. As a result of this shift, very few Jonang scholars existed at this time, and the texts that were written were almost completely dedicated to facilitating practice.

It wasn't until the nonsectarian movement came into full swing during the late nineteenth century that a number of gifted Jonang masters began to, once again, engage in the study and composition of more theoretical texts. Through their efforts, the long tradition of Jonang scholarship was effectively revived, and the Jonang monasteries began to return to a more balanced approach between study and practice. At the forefront of this change was a truly exemplary scholar known as Bamda Gelek Gyatso.

Born in the village of Bamda just a few minutes from Dzamthang, Bamda Gelek was quickly recognized to have an uncommon degree of intelligence. He was known for his capacity to understand virtually any topic with very little difficulty. When he was young, he spent most of his time studying with the teachers of Tsangwa Monastery. When he was eighteen, Bamda Gelek traveled to Kham and enrolled in the Shri Simha Monastic College of Dzogchen Monastery. While there, he studied the five sciences in accordance with the sutric tradition of ancient India. He received a magnificent array of teachings from many great masters such as Dzogchen Rinpoche, Patrul Rinpoche, and so forth.

Following his time in Shri Simha, Bamda Gelek traveled to Palpung Monastery, where he studied and practiced the six dharmas of Naropa under the guidance of the great nonsectarian master Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye. He also began to teach subjects such as the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. It is said that while studying there, he met a man who told him to never be satisfied with merely developing intellectual knowledge. From then on, he put great effort into practicing and internalizing every teaching he received.

When he was twenty-five, he was requested by his younger brother to return to Dzamthang. He eventually agreed and took up residence in Tsangwa Monastery. For the next twelve years, he studied the

Kalachakra diligently under the guidance of Chophel Gyatso and received many empowerments and instructions in other systems of practice.

After the death of his lama, Bamda Gelek continued to study and teach within the Dzamthang region. As a student of the new Tsangwa vajra master Ngawang Chokyi Phakpa, he completed his studies of the Kalachakra and received all of the necessary pith instructions for engaging in the six vajra yogas. He remained at Chokyi Phakpa's side, living in the abbatial residence until his master passed away in 1877.

Bamda Gelek's thirst for Dharma was unquenchable. While practicing in Dzamthang, he continued to study many philosophical texts, especially those of Tsongkhapa and the Geluk textbooks of Jamyang Shepa. By 1884, he had mastered an ocean of sutra and tantra and decided it was time to focus on achieving realizations. He traveled to Kari Ritro and, after requesting teachings from the great yogi Chozin Gyatso, received many profound instructions. After dedicating himself to intensive practice, he then experienced the signs of accomplishment.

From there, he traveled to different mountain hermitages, giving teachings and engaging in strict retreat. With his encyclopedic knowledge and profound understanding of the Dharma, Bamda Gelek had become a true nonsectarian master. Accordingly, students from all over the region began to seek him out. A prolific writer, he devoted much of his time to writing massive volumes of text. Among his collected works are extensive commentaries on every aspect of the *Kalachakra Tantra* and perhaps the largest and most detailed commentary on Asanga's *Ornament of Clear Realization* to exist in the Tibetan language.

Toward the end of his life, Bamda Gelek was invited to become the vajra master of the Kagyu monastery of Yutok, where he established a meditation center dedicated to the practice of the six dharmas of Naropa. The remainder of his time was spent transmitting all the teachings he had received from Jamgon Kongtrul. On the basis of a

retreat schedule he designed, his students flourished and quickly developed many profound realizations.

In his sixty-third year, a vision of Manjushri told him that soon he would be born into the Sublime Realm of Shambhala as one of the Kalki kings. Bamda Gelek's demeanor then became less wrathful, and he slowly hinted at his impending death. One day, after eating his dinner, he dismissed his attendants and sat up in the meditation posture. He passed away soon after, while performing the transference of consciousness in accordance with the teachings he had received.

Bamda Gelek's legacy would live on through one of his close disciples, Ngawang Tsoknyi Gyatso. Recognized as the reincarnation of the great Jonang scholar Nyabon Kunga Pal, Tsoknyi Gyatso began studying at a very early age, mastering the reading and recitation of texts by the time he was eight. When he was ten, he traveled to Kari Ritro and requested teachings from Ngawang Chozin Gyatso. He also received novice ordination and instructions for engaging in the various accumulations that were part of the preliminary practices of the Kalachakra path. Tsoknyi Gyatso applied himself to these practices with great diligence and determination. In time, he came to receive all the necessary empowerments and pith instructions for the unique preliminaries and main practice of the six vajra yogas. Through his practice of these profound methods, Tsoknyi Gyatso ripened his mind and experienced many transformative realizations.

By the time Tsoknyi Gyatso was eighteen, Chozin Gyatso had bestowed on him a vast number of empowerments into different systems of tantric practice. He was also given the complete transmission of Dolpopa's collected works from Kunga Khedrub Wangpo. When Tsoknyi Gyatso dedicated himself to reciting all of the mantras of the various deities, he was eventually able to achieve stable and clear appearances of these in his mind.

Having developed his realization through meditation and mantra, Tsoknyi Gyatso now turned to study and reflection in order to expand his view and improve his capacity to benefit sentient beings.

Under the guidance of Bamda Gelek, he explored a variety of texts on logical reasoning and epistemology. As a result of their collaboration, Bamda Gelek produced a new version of the *Collected Topics* (the textbook used in learning to debate) that included detailed explanations of each topic. Tsoknyi then wrote a massive commentary to Bamda's work that extended the explanations. With these two pioneering works, it became possible for students to not only sharpen their logic but to also gain deep insight into the nature of the reality being debated.

With a firm grasp on the meaning behind the many sutras and tantras, Tsoknyi then moved to Dzamthang Monastery, where he continued his study of the texts written by his teacher Bamda Gelek. After receiving extensive teachings and instructions on the six vajra yogas, he composed a number of texts to clarify many of the difficult points.

When he was thirty years old, Tsoknyi Gyatso lived mainly at the Dzamthang hermitage of Rachung Deden Chosong. During this time, he gave many teachings to the monks and lamas in the region on a vast range of topics, including logic, epistemology, sutras, tantras, and especially Kalachakra. He also composed a vast number of texts commenting on the nature of other-emptiness while providing clear distinction between the various tenets of Buddhist and non-Buddhist systems.

Following after Tsoknyi Gyatso was his heart disciple, Ngawang Lodro Drakpa, more commonly known as the great Mati Rinpoche. As one of the most prolific Jonang authors of the twentieth century, he was believed to be the combined manifestation of many masters such as Dolpopa, Kunga Drolchok, Taranatha, Mipham Jamyang Namgyal Gyatso, and others. As a child, he was found sneaking into the forest to scratch scriptures into pieces of wood. Recognizing him as an extraordinary being, his parents sent him off to study when he was only seven years old. Very quickly he developed knowledge in grammar, astrology, rituals, and various forms of visual and performing arts.

Upon turning twelve, he went to the Darnga Mountain Retreat to receive instruction on how to meditate. Having no intention of teaching a child, the teacher told Lodro Drakpa he must first memorize all of the practice texts for the Kalachakra preliminaries by the start of the next morning. He was astonished when Lodro Drakpa succeeded in this near-impossible task, reciting all of the prayers by heart. Keeping his promise, he allowed the child to stay in retreat. The following day, Lodro Drakpa experienced a vivid dream in which an array of stupas filled the space of his mind. His teacher saw this as an extraordinarily good omen and proceeded to bestow on the young boy the experiential path of the Kalachakra system.

Three years later, Lodro Drakpa took ordination and received instruction in the practice of the six vajra yogas. Through his diligent practice of this and a variety of other tantric systems, he developed great spiritual capacity and would engage in spontaneous songs that expressed his profound realizations.

Lodro Drakpa first met Tsoknyi Gyatso at the Rachung Mountain Retreat, where he studied the entire Jonang curriculum as well as the extensive writings of Bamda Gelek Gyatso. Under his guidance, Lodro Drakpa became a master of epistemology, philosophy, and all forms of sutra and tantra. Moving to Dzamthang, he studied with Lama Lobsang Tsultrim and is said to have memorized the condensed *Perfection of Wisdom* over the course of eight months. After traveling to many of the main Jonang monasteries of his time, Lodro Drakpa became one of the most respected and knowledgeable masters in the region.

Not satisfied with mere intellectual understanding, Lodro Drakpa then turned his focus to integrating the many teachings he had received. He thus spent the majority of his time in strict retreat, practicing the six vajra yogas and the six dharmas of Niguma; he would only emerge occasionally to write. Over time, he was responsible for composing an enormous number of treatises covering many subjects such as epistemology, the philosophy of other-emptiness, and the Kalachakra generation and completion stage practices.

Challenges in a New World

At the start of the twentieth century, the Jonang tradition was once again flourishing. Dzamthang had grown to become one of the largest monastic complexes in the region, with thousands of monks dedicating themselves day and night to the study and practice of the Jonang Dharma. Few could have imagined how quickly the situation would change.

However, the political landscape remained unstable. Imperial powers such as Britain and Russia were eager to get their hands on Tibet, and this led the Qing Dynasty in Beijing to assert its sovereignty over the country. After a number of rebellions flared up against the Chinese in Kham, the emperor began to move more military into the areas of Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan. Tensions, however, were cut short when civil war broke out in China and the Qing Dynasty collapsed. As the remaining warlords formed the new Republic of China, the government of Lhasa declared independence and established Tibet as a sovereign nation.

While events were set in motion to seriously alter the course of Tibetan history, life in Qinghai and Sichuan for the most part remained unchanged. The difference between living under the rule of the Chinese warlords as opposed to the Tibetan chieftains was quite minimal. When faced with resistance, the new warlords could be quite brutal, but, in general, as long as the monasteries didn't interfere with the aims of the Republic, they were left alone with their spiritual freedom intact. As China spent the greater part of the next few decades locked in civil war, the Jonang monks in Dzamthang continued in their quest for enlightenment.

It was during this century of tremendous strife and confusion that a very special monk would be born to not only witness the events that unfolded but to also act as a vital link for maintaining the Jonang lineage. This monk would become my most treasured of teachers, Khyabje Lama Lobsang Trinle.

Born in 1917 in the Zuka region just down the valley from Dzamthang and Bamda, Lobsang Trinle was immediately recognized

as being very special. As a child he would often pretend to be a monk, meditating and giving teachings to his close friends. As he grew a little older, he began to manifest a rather mischievous nature, challenging others whenever the chance arose. His parents were convinced he would become a great warrior, never dreaming he would turn to a spiritual life.

When he was fourteen, he developed a strong determination to become a monk. Although his parents were concerned that he would only cause disruption, he, nonetheless, set out for Chayul Monastery to request teachings. There, Lobsang Trinle met the great Kalachakra master Ngawang Tenpa Rabgye.

Tenpa Rabgye had been a student of Ngawang Chozin Gyatso since he was twelve years of age and went on to master the six vajra yogas while meditating at Chozin Gyatso's hermitage in Kari Ritro. After his master passed away, he traveled to Dzamthang Tsangwa, where he studied under great masters such as Bamda Gelek Gyatso and others. When he completed his studies, he returned to his hometown, Chayul, where he became assistant to the abbot of Chayul Monastery. He remained in this role for twelve years, eventually taking over from his master and assuming leadership of the monastery.

As a truly humble practitioner, Tenpa Rabgye never allowed his social standing to interfere with his spiritual practice. No matter how many offerings he was given, he never used them for luxuries, living his entire life in a simple room and eating only tsampa and butter. In this way, he demonstrated the wealth that comes from a lifestyle rooted in contentment.

From Tenpa Rabgye, Lobsang Trinle received teachings on the five common and two uncommon preliminaries. Applying himself diligently to these practices, he quickly developed the foundational realizations. He then received the Kalachakra empowerments and was guided in the practice of the six vajra yogas. In only two weeks, he manifested the ten signs of the first yoga, moving Tenpa Rabgye to proclaim that Lobsang Trinle was an emanation of a truly extraordinary mahasiddha. While he continued his practice of

Kalachakra with single-pointed determination, he maintained the external appearance of an extremely pure monk. Regardless of his level of realization, he always took great care to protect his monastic discipline.

When Lobsang Trinle was in his twenties, his family fell on hard times and was no longer able to sponsor his study in the monastery. He returned home and continued his spiritual practice while searching for alternative sources of financial support. During this time, he would often recite sutras for the laypeople in the surrounding communities.

One day, his region was visited by the ninth Panchen Lama. Crowds of people gathered around to meet the renowned Geluk master. As the villagers filed past, they offered white scarves, and he laid his hand on their heads. When Lobsang Trinle made his offering, the Panchen Lama stopped and looked at him for a time. He then embraced his head in his hands and brought their foreheads together.

As he reached the age of thirty, his conditions finally improved and he could once again return to his formal study under the tutelage of the great Jonang scholar Lama Lobsang Tsultrim. Lobsang Tsultrim had been a student of Ngawang Chojor Gyatso and was the heart disciple of Lama Tsoknyi Gyatso. He was renowned for being a pristine practitioner who never allowed himself to get caught up in any form of worldly distraction.

For the next two years, Lama Lobsang Trinle—or Lama Lutrin, as he was known by most—followed in his footsteps, studying continuously throughout the day and night, with no need to rest and not allowing himself to become distracted. As a result of his unwavering determination and focus, he completed more than twelve years of study in only a fraction of the time. From this moment on, he became known as a great scholar-practitioner.

In 1949, Lama Lutrin had the great misfortune of contracting leprosy. Consequently, he immediately entered into an intensive five-year retreat on Vajrapani. During this time, he experienced his sickness manifesting in the form of thousands of worms and insects

that flowed out of his body and were absorbed into the offering cakes that were set out on his altar. By the end of the retreat, he was completely cured of his illness without need for further medical treatment. The tormas themselves also became very blessed. They never rotted and maintained a sweet fragrance. When mixed with water, they were known to have great medicinal properties.

As Lama Lutrin fought to rid himself of his sickness, China was undergoing a radical transformation at the hands of the Communist Party. Having defeated the nationalist forces in a brutal civil war and survived the invasion of the Japanese in the Second World War, the Revolutionary Army had successfully united China under a single flag. Now, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, they began to implement sweeping reforms on all levels of society.

As the Communist Party set about consolidating their power in mainland China, the People's Liberation Army was formed to reincorporate territories that they believed were traditionally part of China. To this end, after a number of failed negotiations between the government of Lhasa and the Communist Party, the communists crossed the border into the eastern region of Chamdo, officially declaring war on Tibet. With greater numbers, training, and weapons, the Chinese army quickly dominated the Tibetan forces. After losing their military, the Tibetans were soon forced to accept the treaty that officially made Tibet a part of China and brought it under the direct control of the communist regime in Beijing. And so it was that in 1951, the People's Liberation Army marched into Lhasa.

During most of the 1950s, the central Tibetan government was given a fair degree of autonomy and was generally permitted to continue ruling as it saw fit. While U-Tsang was largely spared from the initial period of land reforms, the eastern provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan were not so lucky. Within many parts of these regions, land was taken from the monasteries and nobles and then redistributed to the peasants. Many of the high lamas were considered nobility and so were imprisoned or forced to participate in struggle sessions—a form of public humiliation in which the

accused was subjected to intensive ridicule, torture, and sometimes death.

While life in many of the eastern provinces was rapidly transforming, Lobsang Trinle was able to escape the brunt of the persecution. In the remote area where he lived, the communists implemented a more gradual process of reform that involved communist officials working with the local communities to build schools and infrastructure. It wasn't until the late 1950s that they shifted to a much harsher approach.

During this period, Lobsang Trinle continued in his retreat, dedicating a significant portion of his time to studying a variety of topics such as astrology, medicine, and Buddhist philosophy. When he emerged after five years in 1954, he had become a master of a vast body of knowledge and was soon asked to become the abbot at Tashi Chothang Monastery. Located very close to Kari Ritro, the monastery had been home for a time to the great yogi Ngawang Chozin Gyatso. While teaching there, Lobsang Trinle used his knowledge to treat many people with leprosy and other sicknesses. Due to his prodigious efforts, he soon became known as a powerful healer, and people from all over the region would seek him out to help them overcome their ailments.

In the later part of the decade, the communists began to round up community leaders and transport them to reeducation camps. Lobsang Trinle was sent to the Yartang camp in Golok. While the conditions were quite harsh, it was here that he met a truly amazing collection of lamas and was fortunate to receive a great deal of teachings.

Due to the various policies of the Communist Party, unrest was growing in the regions of Kham. As the resistance movement spread throughout the region, the People's Liberation Army embarked on a brutal campaign to extinguish the Tibetans' will to fight. In search of the leaders of the resistance, soldiers often resorted to horrific acts such as rape and torture. When the monasteries became bases for guerrilla fighters, the army began targeting monks and nuns. They forced the monastics to give up their vows of celibacy and many

monasteries were subsequently destroyed in their attempts to stamp out the resistance.

While fighting raged in the east, tensions rose in Lhasa. When a rebellion broke out, the Chinese responded by shelling the city. After a few terrifying days, they succeeded in stamping out the uprising and also destroying the great monasteries of Ganden, Drepung, and Sera. It was at this time that the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and took refuge in India. As a result, by the end of 1959, the People's Republic of China had firm control over all of the Tibetan territories.

Then, in 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution. Under the new policies, Tibet's spiritual traditions came under direct attack. All of the concessions that had been made previously were abolished, and many of the land reforms implemented in the east became widespread across the entire plateau.

As part of this movement, thousands of monasteries were annihilated, their books burned, and their precious relics smashed. While the main Jonang monasteries were significantly damaged, Lobsang Trinle worked to save as many sacred items as he could and used his great knowledge of Chinese law to intimidate many communist officials. He was moved to a remote commune far from the eyes of the government and given the task of watching over the government's property. Aware of his identity, Tibetans began to bring him statues and other holy objects, which he hid in the farmhouse where he lived. Slowly, over time, he amassed a treasure trove of invaluable relics.

At this time of terrible strife, many monks and nuns went into hiding. Some lived among the lay communities, working during the day and practicing during the night. Even with the strict bans on all forms of religious activity, many Jonang would risk their lives to uphold the Kalachakra teachings. Others escaped into the wilderness, seeking shelter in remote caves, and diligently preserved the continuity of the vajra yoga lineage.

After the death of Mao in 1976, Lobsang Trinle moved back to the ruins of Tashi Chothang Monastery. At that time, the only building left was the main temple, which had been used by communist

soldiers as a base of operations. Within these ruins, Lobsang Trinle began to teach.

He made very little effort to rebuild the monastery physically. Following the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, the people of Amdo and Kham were desperately poor, and as his main priority was the preservation of the pure teachings of the Buddha, reconstruction would have to wait until conditions improved. He focused all his energy on giving empowerments and teachings to the hundreds of students that gathered around him. In time, many of these students became accomplished scholars and practitioners. From Chothang, the teachers would go out to other monasteries in the region, helping them reestablish their monastic colleges for the authentic study of sutra and tantra.

In the latter part of his life, Lobsang Trinle decided to pass the main responsibility of training students to his two close disciples: Lama Ngangtong and Khenpo Ngawang Pal. Known as a monk of great purity, Lama Ngangtong achieved significant realization through working with his subtle winds and channels. He studied Kalachakra under the guidance of the great yogi Ngawang Rinpal and later with Lobsang Trinle, who appointed him as his regent, making him the current vajra master of Tashi Chothang. Khenpo Ngawang Pal was chosen as the resident teacher to provide the academic foundations for the monks. A great scholar-practitioner, he has studied under a variety of masters and is particularly well versed in the works of Bamda Gelek Gyatso. Under the steady and focused leadership of these two disciples, Tashi Chothang has flourished to this day and is now home to many hundreds of monks.

As word of Lobsang Trinle's activities spread, thousands of people came to him for help and guidance. While some relied on him for his mastery of astrological calculations, others came to have their illnesses cured. People who had suffered for many years were often miraculously healed after just a few simple treatments. He became so famous as a healer, people who weren't even sick started to ask for his treatments, considering them to be a great blessing.

Despite his renown, Lobsang Trinle continued to live a simple life of renunciation, caring little for worldly concerns such as fame or social standing. Even though he was invited to teach in many famous monasteries and universities, he was never distracted from his main focus on practice. While many monasteries were working hard to rebuild their institutions due to the years of disruption by the communist soldiers, there was a significant degeneration in monastic discipline. For this reason, out of his deep respect for the *Kalachakra Tantra,* he refused to teach the vajra yogas to anyone other than the most dedicated and genuine practitioners.

When I first arrived at Chothang in 1991, I remember being struck by its humble surroundings. Unlike other monasteries I had been accustomed to, there were no brightly painted temples or fancy ornamentation. To the external eye, it appeared simple and somewhat rundown, but, despite this, the monks there seemed to be filled with a contentment and dedication to the Dharma unlike anything I had ever encountered.

The first time I saw my precious guru was at a public celebration held during Lama's teaching on the subject of the Great Middle Way. I was very fortunate at this time to meet him in person, and we sat together for an hour discussing the Dharma. The next day, I was deeply impressed by his style of teaching. He was very engaged with his students, asking them many questions that forced them to explore their understanding of the Dharma. It became clear to me that Lama did not accept the mere memorization of texts; he wanted us to fully comprehend the meaning so it could be integrated into our practice.

Later that year, at the request of the Tsangwa vajra master Yonten Sangpo, we traveled to the newly reestablished Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery where Lama gave a month of teachings to more than two thousand monks. During the many lively discussions that arose during these teachings, Lama spent much of his time responding to our questions and clarifying our confusion. One night, I showed him a number of objections to the view of other-emptiness that had been raised by a Geluk scholar. With great joy, he asked me to bring the

text to the next day's teachings. On the basis of this text, he went through each and every objection, successfully clearing away all doubts about the Jonang position.

During my time in Chothang, I was fortunate enough to receive from my precious Lama the complete transmission of the profound Kalachakra path in accordance with the Jonang tradition. He first taught us the common preliminary practices, followed by all the necessary empowerments and pith instructions for engaging in the uncommon preliminaries specific to Kalachakra. For many months, we practiced diligently to prepare our minds for engaging in the completion-stage practices.

When Lama bestowed on us the Kalachakra empowerments, I was struck by his ability to know every single meaning behind all the minute details of the enlightened Kalachakra mandala and its 636 deities. With his immensely potent influence, it was as though the entire monastery transformed into a pure land where no mental afflictions could possibly arise.

After completing all the preliminaries, we engaged in a three-year retreat to practice the six vajra yogas. During this time, Lama asked me to lead two of the groups. As this responsibility was a great honor for me, I became determined to fully understand the teachings I had received in order to effectively guide others. For the greater part of three years, we worked diligently day and night at our meditation practice.

Finally, in 1997, as we completed the final offering ceremony for the retreat, Lama entered the room and spoke many kind words about the group leaders. Much to my and everyone else's surprise, Lama chose to single me out and bestow on me the title of khenpo, which meant I was a qualified teacher. While he had given this title to many students in his lifetime, this was the first time he had done so in such a public manner. He also gave me two very special gifts—the hat he used during every one of his teachings and a very special handwritten copy of Lama Tsoknyi's commentary for his personal practice of Amitabha. In this way, Lama empowered me to become a teacher and to carry on his lineage.

Following the completion of my retreat, I did not feel much urgency to start teaching right away and, instead, chose to continue my studies by traveling to different monasteries in the region. During this time, I had the wonderful opportunity to study in the great nonsectarian monastery of Larung Gar. Founded originally by the nonsectarian master Jigme Phuntsok, Larung Gar is now the largest monastic settlement in all of China and Tibet. At any given time, there are usually tens of thousands of monks, nuns, and lay practitioners all living in the same valley. To study in Larung Gar was a great honor for me and allowed me to have many deep discussions about Dharma with many teachers from different traditions. I had studied in numerous monasteries by then, and this was a great chance for me to truly integrate everything I had learned.

I also spent some time in Jonang Chamda Monastery under the guidance of Lobsang Trinle's contemporary, Kunga Sherab Salje. Khenpo Sherab, as he was called, was a student of Lodro Drakpa and had received extensive teachings in all the eight great practice lineages. Like Lobsang Trinle, when the religious restrictions were lifted in 1980, Khenpo Sherab made significant effort to revive the teachings, not only within the Jonang but also in other traditions. Khenpo Sherab was the first high lama from the Jonang tradition to travel to India and Nepal where he gave teachings to the fourteenth Dalai Lama and to the Karmapa's tutor Bokar Rinpoche. Since 1992, his main student, Khenpo Lobsang Chodrak, has been teaching the Jonang Dharma to the monks of Chamda. While studying with both Khenpo Sherab and Lobsang Chodrak, I wrote my first book—a short treatise on the ground, path, and result of the Great Middle Way.

A year later, I was asked to go to Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery, where Lama Yonten Sangpo gave me a number of gifts with a white ceremonial scarf and requested I stay and become a teacher. Yonten Sangpo had been the heart disciple of Lama Lodro Drakpa, acting as his personal assistant over the last few decades. After the lifting of restrictions, through his hard work and determination, Yonten Sangpo became the vajra master at Dzamthang and eventually the de facto leader of the Jonang tradition.

As part of the cultural rejuvenation of the 1980s, the tenth Panchen Lama asked all of the different traditions to prepare a presentation of their unique views and practices. He requested that Lama Lobsang Trinle travel to Beijing in order to represent the Jonang tradition. Lobsang Trinle declined, but, in his stead, sent Yonten Sangpo. As a result of his skillful presentation, the Jonang were registered as one of the unique spiritual traditions of Tibet. In total, the Chinese government recognized six official traditions: Bon, Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, Jonang, and Geluk. Over time, Yonten Sangpo became well known within the growing Chinese Buddhist community. With the help of his Tibetan and Chinese students, he was slowly able to rebuild many of Dzamthang's buildings and sponsor the creation of new woodblocks for printing the complete works of both Dolpopa and Taranatha. Accordingly, Yonten Sangpo played an important role in the preservation of the lineage.

Yonten Sangpo was succeeded by Ngawang Jigme Dorje, who is the eighth reincarnation of the founder of the monastery, Lodro Namgyal. Recognized at a very young age, Jigme Dorje was assigned tutors to ensure he received the best possible education and spiritual support. He received an ocean of teachings from Ngawang Konchok Dargye and the great scholar Lama Lodro Drakpa. Like many high lamas, during the time of restrictions, he practiced in secret, maintaining his strict discipline and focus on the Dharma. In the 1980s, Jigme Dorje was asked to become the vajra master at Tsenang Monastery. In the mid-1990s, Yonten Sangpo requested he take over his position at Dzamthang Tsangwa. From then onward, Jigme Dorje has focused all of his energy on teaching the next generation of Jonang monks.

During his life, Yonten Sangpo dreamed of building a life-sized manifestation of the glorious Kalachakra mandala. It was only recently that one of his students, Tulku Jamyang Lodro, was able to gather the necessary conditions to begin making his vision a reality. For the last few years, construction has been underway building this massive project that measures close to 150 meters wide at the base and 65 meters tall. When the project is finished, it will be a one-of-a-

kind temple and a major pilgrimage site for all who wish to connect with the peace and harmony of Shambhala.

While I knew it was a great honor to be asked to teach at Dzamthang, I was unsure about accepting the position. I therefore requested Yonten Sangpo to allow me first to speak with Lobsang Trinle to ask his permission. When I met with Lama at Chothang, he could see my heart longed for more than being an academic scholar with high status. He told me not to worry and that I would not have to spend long in that position.

Over the next few months, while I taught the monks of Dzamthang various foundational topics such as monastic discipline and logic, I developed a very strong aspiration to follow in the footsteps of one of Lobsang Trinle's students, Kyangak Kontsul. Kyangak had completely abandoned all worldly comforts to become a yogi living in the forest. When the opportunity arose, I chose to renounce my position and set out as a wandering ascetic. I made my way into the forest and found a cave where I could meditate. I stayed there for roughly seven weeks until one day I received a number of signs indicating that I should return home. It had become very clear to me that the life of an ascetic yogi was not for me either.

As I began to contemplate what I should do with the rest of my life, I spent time studying the *Guhysamaja Tantra* with the teacher Delek Rabgye and a few other monks from the Golok monastery, Longkya Mingyur Dechen Ling. Longkya had been founded by a great scholar-practitioner known as Monlam Sangpo, who was from my own village. Originally, it was a nomadic monastery consisting of nothing more than a collection of tents moving from valley to valley. Eventually, it took root and became a major center for the practice of Kalachakra. During much of the twentieth century, Longkya's vajra master was the famed yogi Ngawang Padma Namgyal. Under the excellent guidance of Monlam Sangpo, Padma Namgyal received extensive empowerments, teachings, and instructions for the practice of all the higher systems of tantra. His specialty, however, was the Kalachakra according to the Jonang tradition.

Padma Namgyal's heart disciple is the extraordinarily humble and compassionate Choktrul Jamyang Jinpa. Recognized from a very early age as a special being, Jamyang Jinpa had a great desire to become a monk, but his mother and father wanted him to raise a family. After many attempts, he was finally able to break away from his parents and take ordination in Longkya. He went on to study and practice Kalachakra, engaging diligently in all of the common and uncommon preliminaries. When he began to practice the six yogas, it is said he developed an extremely pure vision of his master and experienced all phenomena as though he were in meditative equipoise. After his mother died, Jamyang Jinpa began to live with Padma Namgyal as his personal attendant. Just before his passing away, Padma Namgyal gathered everyone together and gave many teachings while holding Jamyang Jinpa's hand. At the end, he officially announced that Jamyang Jinpa would become his regent. Since that time, Jamyang Jinpa has proven to be a truly amazing teacher, responsible for guiding hundreds of dedicated practitioners through the Kalachakra path.

During this time with Delek Rabgye, I began to form the aspiration to travel to India. While I didn't know exactly what my future would hold, I knew that there was much more waiting for me beyond the borders of Amdo. I longed to learn about this unknown world and the people who inhabited it.

Before I had a chance to act on these aspirations, an uneasy feeling arose in my mind, and I felt a strong need to see Lama Lobsang Trinle. Setting out immediately, I arrived at Chothang to find that my precious Lama had passed into parinirvana just three days earlier. I was told later that Lobsang Trinle had predicted he would die that year and over the last three months of his life, gave many teachings to everyone in the monastery.

A few years before his passing, the monks of Chothang built a temple to house all of Lama's relics and books after his death. The idea was to establish a continuous Kalachakra retreat there with two monks taking one-year shifts. Days before his death, Lama announced that he wanted all of his books to be kept in the main

temple, while all of his relics should be sent to the Potala Palace in Lhasa. While this decision caused a great deal of controversy within the Jonang community, Lama assured them he had his reasons and to trust him. He also gathered together all of the local community leaders and told them that they were not allowed to look for his reincarnation. Finally, he prophesied his own death by asking one of Tsangwa's reincarnated lamas to return in ten days in order to perform the awakening ceremony—a ritual in which a yogi's mind is stirred from his meditation on the clear light of death.

When Lobsang Trinle was ready, he put on his ceremonial robes and assumed the meditation posture. After looking intently at each of his students one by one, he proclaimed, "I am now going to Sukhavati. Any person who is devoted to me or to Amitabha Buddha can also be born there." With that, he took one small inhalation and released with one long exhalation. He remained in the clear light of death for approximately five days.

Following his death, Lama Lobsang Trinle's body was cremated in the traditional manner. In keeping with his wishes, all of the relics collected from this process were then sent to Lhasa. The monks in Chothang performed extensive prayers and rituals for seven weeks and, at the end of this period, many of his students made pledges to renounce all worldly concerns and dedicate themselves to practice. In my own case, I promised that for the next seven years, I would completely give up my family and would not stay in Tibet. Even though it was culturally very difficult for me to do this, I decided that I would travel to India and visit the many holy sites of the Buddha.

The Need to Connect with Lineage Masters

Over the course of the last nineteen years since I left Tibet, I have had the good fortune to travel around the world and meet with a wide variety of people. What I have observed is that due to the incredible kindness of masters such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness the Sakya Trizin, as well as various past masters

such as Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, Kalu Rinpoche, Bokar Rinpoche, and others, an enormous number of seeds have been sown to connect the beings of this world to the Sublime Realm of Shambhala. The Dalai Lama alone has given the greater empowerments of Kalachakra thirty-four times to more than a million students. This is truly wonderful!

However, what I have also observed is that from among all of those people, there are very few who know how to nurture those seeds so that they will ripen into the experience of Shambhala. While there are some with a general understanding of the theory of *Kalachakra Tantra,* there is generally an absence of people who are actively putting these teachings into practice. I believe that this is at least partially due to the fact that they do not know where to look for guidance.

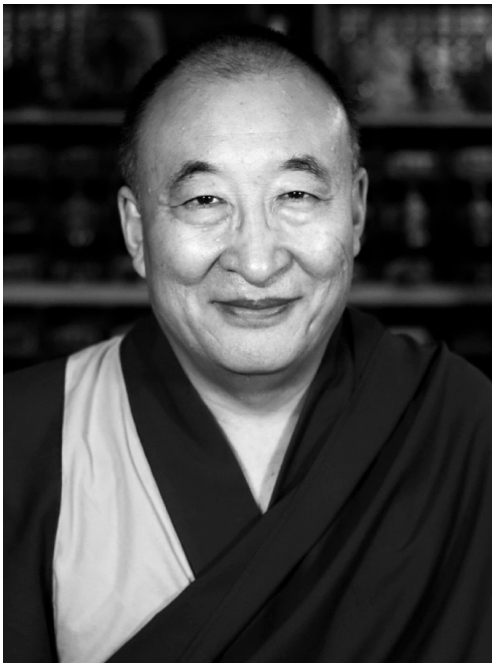
What I hope that you are now able to see is that due to the tireless devotion and perseverance of the Jonang masters, the direct path to Shambhala has been preserved to this day in its entirety. In fact, even as you read these words, there are thousands of practitioners in Dzamthang and the surrounding regions who are studying the Great Middle Way and practicing the six vajra yogas.

All that is needed for the Dharma of Shambhala to take root in the rest of the world is for the people of this world to connect their aspiration for greater peace and harmony to the skillful means that are provided by the lineage. It is for this reason that I have dedicated my life to sharing the wisdom that I have received from my own precious teachers.

From my own experience, I can see that this rare jewel that I have been given is more precious than anything I could ever imagine. How foolish I would be if I did not take advantage of it while I had this opportunity, especially since I know that these teachings will not be here forever. Right now, they are flourishing in Dzamthang. But for how long? Sooner or later, I know they will disappear, just as they did from India and just as they did in central Tibet. Therefore, I urge you not to wait. I urge you to seek out these teachings and put them into practice as much as you can.

SKIP NOTES

* *The five great treasuries are*: (1) *Treasury of Knowledge,* (2) *Treasury of Precious Instructions,* (3) *Treasury of the Kagyu Oral Tradition,* (4) *Treasury of Precious Termas, and* (5) *Treasury of Extensive Teachings.*



About the Author

Khentrul Rinpoche is a nonsectarian master of Tibetan Buddhism. He has devoted his life to a wide variety of spiritual practices, studying with more than twenty-five masters from all of the major Tibetan traditions. While he has genuine respect and appreciation for all spiritual systems, he has the greatest confidence and experience with his personal path of the Kalachakra tantra as taught in the Jonang-Shambhala tradition.

Rinpoche brings a sharp and inquisitive mind to everything he does. His teachings are accessible and direct, often emphasizing a very pragmatic sensibility. Over the years, Rinpoche has authored a variety of books to guide his students and has specifically made great

efforts to translate and provide commentary on texts that present the gradual stages of the Kalachakra path.

Rinpoche has no doubt that our world has the potential to develop genuine peace and harmony while still preserving its environment and humanity. He believes this golden age of Shambhala is possible through the study and practice of the Kalachakra system. To this end, Rinpoche travels the world to share his knowledge of this unique lineage, free from sectarian bias.

Recognizing that lasting genuine happiness is only possible through profound personal transformation, Khentrul Rinpoche's main focus is to introduce the world to the unique path of the Kalachakra tantra. Up until now, the complete teachings of this tradition have remained in Tibet, where they have been preserved by the Jonang tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It is Rinpoche's life mission to bring this wisdom into the world at a time when it is so desperately needed. There are four ways in which Rinpoche accomplishes this goal.

Teaching the Essence of the Kalachakra Tantra

The *Kalachakra Tantra* is known as the king of tantra due to its profound wisdom regarding the nature of reality and its vast quantity of skillful methods for actualizing that wisdom in one's own experience. When compared with other tantras, the Kalachakra system can appear extremely complex and overwhelming to all but the most astute of practitioners. For this reason, Khentrul Rinpoche invests a great deal of his time and energy toward communicating the essential meaning behind the teachings so that students at any level of development can approach and draw benefit from this system.

To this end, Rinpoche travels around the world introducing students to five main subjects that can be used to understand the various aspects of Kalachakra practice: (1) understanding the relationship between Shambhala and Kalachakra, (2) how to remove

bias through a nonsectarian philosophy, (3) how to identify the definitive meaning through the view of other-emptiness, (4) how to practice the common and uncommon preliminaries of Kalachakra, and (5) how to practice the six vajra yogas of the Kalachakra completion stage.

Preserving the Lineage through Writing and Translating

To support an ever-expanding community of Kalachakra practitioners, Rinpoche recognizes the need to have quality materials for both study and practice. By relying on his various books, students can build on the teachings they receive and thereby prepare themselves for future practices. While Rinpoche's oral teachings emphasize the essence of Kalachakra, Rinpoche's books present the path in great detail, providing a clear structure for working through the vast material in a gradual manner.

In addition to his original works, Rinpoche also collaborates with translators in order to communicate to the world the ancient wisdom of the Kalachakra lineage masters. His aspiration is to make the Kalachakra teachings available in every major language, reducing the barriers to study and practice for international students.

Creating a Global Community of Kalachakra Practitioners

The golden age will not occur as a result of a single event but as a cumulative result of the combined efforts of the people on this planet. We, as individuals, first need to learn to cultivate peace and harmony within our own minds in order for it to arise in our world. Understanding this, Rinpoche actively encourages his students to build spiritual communities that promote the cultivation of qualities such as love, compassion, and wisdom. Through their shared practice of Kalachakra, these communities will form a global network

of practitioners, dedicated to the actualization of their enlightened nature.

Rinpoche achieves this by working closely with his students, generating abundant opportunities for them to accumulate merit and for them to strengthen the karmic connection with one another. He does this mainly through encouraging his students to participate in the many varied Dharma-related projects he oversees and coordinates. These projects range from simple administrative tasks to more complex ventures such as building ornate holy objects. It also includes organizing international tours and events where communities can come together and bond as a single vajra family.

Building Retreat Centers for Intensive Practice

The last component for actualizing the golden age is to create the physical infrastructure required to support long-term retreat in conditions conducive to meditation. Not only is it necessary to have locations where students can dedicate themselves to the teachings, but it is also important to create connections with yogic practitioners who can guide students through the various experiences that arise during advanced retreat.

At this time, the most extraordinary practitioners of Kalachakra are currently meditating in Tibet. Unfortunately, conditions in Tibet make it difficult for international students to meet and learn from these yogis. For this reason, Rinpoche is working hard to construct an International Kalachakra Retreat Center in the hills above Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery. His vision is to create a space where generations of students from all over the world can come to receive rare transmissions and to practice within the incredible blessings of the region. Eventually, Rinpoche hopes these same students will then convey those blessings to the rest of the world.